

SALVAGE FROM THE CYNTHIA

The Fitzroy Edition of
JULES VERNE

Edited by I. O. Evans



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The Begum's Fortune
Five Weeks in a Balloon
Dropped from the Clouds
The Secret of the Island
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Salvage from the Cynthia

JULES VERNE & ANDRÉ LAURIE

SALVAGE FROM THE CYNTHIA

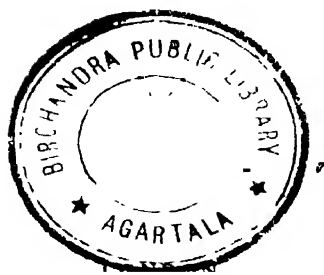
OR

THE BOY ON THE BUOY

Translated from the French by

L. O. EVANS

F. R. C. S.



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INTRODUCTION

POSSIBLY BECAUSE it is not undiluted Verne but was written in collaboration, this narrative does not seem hitherto to have been translated. Yet it is certainly original, with adventurous episodes, good characterisation, and vivid passages of description, and it is superior to other Verne's which have appeared in English. I have found it impossible to decide how much of it is Verne and how much is Laurie; nor is this surprising, for Laurie was a disciple of Verne's and must have picked up much of his technique.

The factual basis of the story is the discovery of the North-East Passage by Nordenskiöld in 1878-9. As in the narrative, he was lost sight of for a time: he had hoped to complete the voyage in one season, and indeed almost succeeded; but not far from the Behring Strait he was held up by the weather and forced to winter in the ice. One member of his expedition, Dr. Almqvist, actually made tests of the natives' colour-sense, and found it normal, much as is related: but if he found a strayed European, tattooed in the manner described, I have yet to trace a mention of it.

As to Verne's collaborator (to use a typical Verne mannerism) he was almost as astonishing a person as a typical Verne character: Roger Lancelyn Green, in his admirable account of 'space-flight in fiction,' *Into Other Worlds*, calls him a 'voluminous jack-of-all-trades.'

Paschal Grousset was born in Corsica in 1845. After studying medicine in Paris, he plunged into scientific and polemical journalism. He made a number of political enemies, and as a result of a duel which ended fatally he spent two months in prison. On his release he began a savage journalistic campaign against the Empire of Napoleon III, and for this he was very hotly criticised.

During the Franco-Prussian War he served in the infantry, and on its conclusion he returned to political journalism. As an active and leading member of the Commune, he got into touch with left-wing sympathisers in other lands. Placed on trial for

these activities on the suppression of the Commune, he was sentenced to deportation.

Transported to the Penal Settlements in New Caledonia in 1872, he escaped two years later with six other prisoners. On reaching England, he advocated what he called the 'admirable principles of the Commune,' but he seems not so much to have made converts as to have estranged his own comrades.

When, in 1880, an amnesty was granted to political prisoners he returned to France. Again plunging into public affairs, he was several times elected to the Chamber of Deputies as a 'radical socialist,' and again took part in a number of controversies.

He had two pen-names and wrote under them as well as under his own name. As Paschal Grousset he wrote several political works, including one on conditions in the Penal Settlements. As 'Phillipe Daryl' he wrote several books, dealing with such subjects as *London* and *The English in Ireland*; he also wrote advocating physical education, for which he had a real enthusiasm.

As 'André Laurie' he wrote on a variety of subjects. He described life in a number of European countries. He translated one of Mayne Reid's stories and Stevenson's *Treasure Island* and compiled several adventure-yarns for young people. He followed Verne in being a pioneer of science fiction, writing on such startling themes as *The Crystal City under the Sea* and *The Conquest of the Moon*. The last-named is an account of an attempt to attract the moon within grazing distance of the earth by means of a powerful electro-magnet—Lancelyn Green describes it as 'quite the most preposterous journey to another world of the century.' Finally, he collaborated with Verne in producing *Salvage from the Cynthia*.

To the literal translation of the book's original title I have added a sub-title. Though this may strike the reader as too atrocious a pun, yet I think it would have appealed to Verne, for he was addicted to atrocious puns himself.

CHAPTER I

HERR MALARIUS MEETS AN OLD FRIEND

IN ALL probability there had never been, either in Europe or anywhere else, a scientist whose appearance was better known than that of Dr. Schwaryencrona; his portrait, reproduced by the vendors below his trade-mark on millions of bottles with their green seals, accompanied the bottles even to the ends of the earth.

Truth compels us to say that all that these bottles held was cod-liver oil, medically praiseworthy and even beneficial. At one time its manufacture had been in the hands of the fisher-folk. But today the processes of extraction are more scientific, and the prince of that highly-specialised industry is no other than Dr. Schwaryencrona.

There can't have been anybody who hadn't noticed that pointed beard, that pair of spectacles, that hooked nose, that fur hat—the engraving may not be one of the best, but it certainly is a strikingly good likeness. This is shown by what happened one day in the primary school of Noroë, on the western coast of Norway, a few miles from Bergen.

It was just two in the afternoon. The pupils were in their class within the great hall with its sanded floor—girls on the left, boys on the right—employed in following a theorem which the master, Herr Malarius, was demonstrating on the blackboard, when suddenly the door was opened, and a fur coat, fur boots, fur gloves and a fur hat appeared on the threshold.

The pupils at once rose respectfully, as is only right and proper when a visitor comes into the class-room. Not two of them had ever before seen the newcomer. But they all whispered as soon as they set eyes on him:

‘Herr Dr. Schwaryencrona.’

So good a likeness was the portrait engraved on the doctor's bottles.

It must be admitted that Herr Malarius' pupils had had

these bottles in front of them almost always, for the very good reason that one of the doctor's principal factories was situated in Noroë. But it is no less true that the doctor had not set foot in the country for years, and that not one of the children could flatter himself with ever before having seen him in the flesh.

In their imagination it was quite another thing. Dr. Schwaryencrona was often discussed during the evenings at Noroë. Indeed, if there is a vestige of truth in the well-known saying, his ears must often have tingled.

Yes, there he undoubtedly was, with the pointed beard, the pair of spectacles, the hooked nose, and the fur hat of the famous scientist. No misunderstanding was possible. All Herr Malarius' pupils would have gone to the stake for it.

But what surprised them, and maybe disappointed them a little, was to find that the doctor was only a man of ordinary medium size, and not the giant they had thought him to be. How could so illustrious a savant possibly be content with a height of only five feet three inches? His grey head hardly reached Herr Malarius' shoulder, although Herr Malarius was already bowed with age. On the other hand, he was thinner than the doctor, and that made him seem twice as tall. His great maroon overcoat, to which long usage had given a greenish tint, floated behind him like a flag upon its staff. He wore breeches and buckled shoes, with a black silk cap from beneath which escaped a few strands of white hair. His pink smiling face demonstrated a perfect kindness. He too wore spectacles, which didn't pierce one like the doctor's, but through which his blue eyes seemed to regard everything with inexhaustible benevolence.

Within living memory Herr Malarius had never punished any of his pupils, but that did not prevent his being respected, because he was loved. He was so good-hearted, and everybody knew him so well! Nor were they unaware, in Noroë, that in his youth he had passed his examination very brilliantly, and that he too could have been promoted, have become Herr Professor in some great university, have won wealth and fame.

But he had a sister, his poor Kristina, always ill and always in pain. And, as nothing in the world would have induced her

to leave her village, so much did she fear the towns, Herr Malarius had willingly sacrificed himself for her. And when, about twenty years later, Kristina had died, blessing him as she was dying, Herr Malarius, accustomed to an obscure and unknown life, had never thought of beginning another. Absorbed in personal studies which he forgot to give to the world, he found his greatest pleasure in being a model instructor, in having the best-run school in the country, and especially in leaving primary education for advanced studies. He loved to urge his best pupils on in their work, to initiate them into the sciences, into the ancient and modern literatures; into everything which normally falls to lot of the rich and comfortably off and not to fisherfolk and peasants.

'Why shouldn't what's good for the one be good for the others?' he used to say. 'If poor people can't have all the joys of life here below, why should we refuse to let them meet Homer and Shakespeare, and name the star which guides them across the sea, the plant which grows at their feet? Work will soon come to take them by the throat and bend them to the furrow! Let them at least drink from a pure well and share in the common inheritance of mankind!'

In more than one country such ideas would have been thought rash, and only fitted to disgust the humble with the lowliness of their lot, and to turn them into mere adventurers. But in Norway nobody dreams of worrying about this. The inherited mildness of the national character, the scarcity of the towns, the laborious habits of a very sparse population, seem to remove any risks from such experiments, and so they are more common than might be thought. Nowhere are standards so high, in the poorest village schools as in the colleges. So, proportionally to its population, the Scandinavian peninsula may be able to flatter itself on producing more savants and distinguished men of all types than no matter what other region of Europe. The traveller is continually impressed with the contrast between so wild a nature and the factories and the works of art which denote the highest degree of civilisation.

But maybe it is time to return to Doctor Schwaryencrona, whom we have left on the threshold of Noroë school.

If the pupils, though they had been so quick to recognise

him, had never seen him before, this was by no means true of their instructor.

'Well, good afternoon, my dear Malarius!' came the cordial greeting as the visitor strode forward towards the school-master with outstretched hand.

'You're very welcome, sir,' Malarius replied, a little 'bewildered and a little timid like all recluses, and moreover taken unawares in the middle of his demonstration. 'Will you pardon me if I ask to whom I have the honour . . .'

'What! Have I changed so much since we used to run through the snow together and smoke our long pipes in Christiania? Have you forgotten Krauss's boarding-house, and do I really have to give you the name of your old comrade and friend?'

'Schwaryencrona!' Herr Malarius exclaimed 'Impossible! Is it really you? Herr Doctor, is it you?'

'Oh, don't stand on ceremony, please! Aren't I your old Roff, just as you'll always be good old Olaf—the best and dearest friend of my youth? Oh yes, I understand! Time flies, and we've both changed a little in thirty years! But our hearts are still young, aren't they? And won't they always have a soft spot for the ones whom we learned to love when we chewed dry bread together in our twenties?'

And the doctor laughed as he grasped the hands of Herr Malarius, whose eyes were wet with tears.

'My dear old friend,' he replied 'We're not going to stay here. I'm going to give these rascals a half-holiday, which won't distress them at all, and then we'll go along to my place.'

'No, no' the doctor turned towards the pupils, who had been following the scene with keen interest. 'I don't want to disturb your work or to upset the studies of these fine young people! If you want to do me a real favour, you'll let me sit down here beside you, and you can go on with the lesson.'

'Why, of course,' Herr Malarius assured him. 'But to tell the truth, I shan't have any heart for geometry, and after these youngsters have heard us mention a holiday, I feel rather uneasy about going back on my word! But there's a way of settling everything. It's for Dr. Schwaryencrona to deign to

give my pupils the honour of putting them through an examination, and then let them loose for the rest of the day!'

'A splendid idea! Right! So here I am pretending to be the inspector!'

Then, speaking to the whole class 'Tell me, who's the best pupil?' he asked them as he sat down at the schoolmaster's desk.

'Erik Hersebom!' fifty clear voices replied without a moment's hesitation.

'Oh, so it's Erik Hersebom? Very well. Erik Hersebom, will you please come here?'

A boy of about twelve left his place and went forward. He was a serious-looking child, whose thoughtful face and large penetrating eyes which would have attracted attention anywhere, seemed especially remarkable in the midst of the blond heads which surrounded him. While all his schoolmates of both sexes had flaxen hair, ruddy complexions, and blue or green eyes, his own hair was dark chestnut, as were his eyes, that of a brunette.

He lacked the projecting cheek-bones, the short nose and the heavy appearance of the children of Scandinavia. In his physical character, at any rate, he was obviously different from the specialised and clearly-marked race to which his fellow-pupils belonged.

Like them, he was clad in the coarse cloth made locally; but his small and refined-looking head, carried on a slender neck, the natural grace of his movements—all seemed to indicate a foreign origin. Any physiologist would have been struck by these details, just as Dr. Schwaryencrona was. But for the moment the doctor had no reason for dwelling upon them. So he simply went on with the examination. 'Where shall we begin? With grammar?' he asked.

'Herr Doctor, I'm at your orders,' was Erik's modest reply.

The doctor asked him one or two simple questions, and was amazed to find that he could give the answer not only for Swedish grammar but also for French and English. This was the custom with Herr Malarius, who always said that it was as easy to learn three languages together as one.

'So you teach them French and English?' The doctor turned towards his friend.

‘Why not, along with the elements of Greek and Latin! I can’t see what harm that will do.’

‘Neither can I!’ laughed the doctor. And he opened at random a volume of Cicero from which Erik translated a number of sentences.

Then came a question about the hemlock which Socr tes had had to drink. Erik replied without hesitation that it belonged to the umbelliferous family, smyrmia tribe, and described its characteristics.

From botany they went on to geometry. Erik gave a very clear demonstration of the theorem regarding the sum of the angles of a triangle.

The doctor got surprise after surprise. ‘Let’s have a little geography,’ he continued. ‘What’s the sea which skirts the northern coast of Scandinavia, Russia, and Siberia.’

‘It’s the ice-bound Arctic Ocean.’

‘And what are the seas with which it communicates?’

‘The Atlantic to the west and the Pacific to the east.’

‘Will you name two or three important seaports on the Pacific?’

‘I’ll name Yokohama in Japan, Melbourne in Australia, San Francisco in the State of California.’

‘Well, as the Arctic Ocean communicates on the one side with the Atlantic which bathes our own shores, and on the other side with the Pacific -don’t you think that the shortest way to get to Yokohama or San Francisco would be via the Arctic?’

‘It certainly would be the shortest, Herr Doctor, if it were practicable. But so far all the navigators who’ve tried to follow it have found their way blocked by ice, and they’ve had to give up the attempt-- when they haven’t met with death.

‘You say that several of them have tried to find the North-east Passage?’

‘About fifty times during the last three centuries, but always in vain?’

‘Can you name a few of these expeditions?’

Erik named quite a number of them, from that of Cabot in 1523 to the most recent attempts of the Russians to find a direct route to Northern Siberia. ‘But’ he concluded ‘if these expeditions have had the result of making these waters better

known, they've led to the conclusion that it's impossible to find a continuous route through the Arctic. Van Baer, who made the last attempt in eighteen thirty-seven, declared outright that this ocean is nothing but a field of glacier as impracticable for ships as if it were a land-mass.'

'So we must finally abandon the idea of a North-east Passage?'

'That at any rate is the conclusion which seems to result from so many attempts—all of them fruitless. But they say our great traveller Nordenskiöld is thinking about reviving the enterprise, after preparing for it by making several explorations of special regions in the Arctic. If so, it must be because he thinks it practicable. And if that is really his opinion, he's competent enough for it to be taken seriously.'

Dr. Schwaryencrona was himself one of the warmest admirers of Nordenskiöld; that was why he had begun the discussion of the North-east Passage. So he was delighted with these clear replies, and he looked at Erik with the liveliest interest.

'And where did you learn all this, my boy?' he asked.

'Here, of course, Herr Doctor' Erik was surprised at the question.

'You've never belonged to any other school.'

'No, never.'

'Herr Malarius has a right to be proud of you!' and the doctor turned towards the schoolmaster.

'I'm very pleased with Erik,' replied the latter 'It's almost eight years since he became my pupil, for I've had him since he was small, and he's always been the foremost in his age-group.'

The doctor had fallen silent, but his piercing glance was fixed upon Erik with a strange intensity. He seemed to be thinking out the solution of some problem which he did not wish to voice aloud.

'It wouldn't have been possible to give better answers to my questions, and I think it would be pointless to continue the examination!' he decided at last. 'I won't keep you from your holiday, children, and if Herr Malarius agrees, we'll stop there for today.'

At these words the master struck his hands together. All

the pupils at once rose to their feet, collected their books, and lined up, four deep, in the space in front of the desks.

Again Herr Malarius struck his hands together. The column marched forward, keeping time with a military precision.

A third signal, and the school, breaking rank, dispersed with joyful cries. In a few seconds they were scattered all round the blue waters of the fiord, which reflected the turfed roofs of Noroë village.

CHAPTER II

A FISHERMAN'S HOME

THE HOUSE of Captain Hersebom, like all those in Norway, is covered with a turfed roof and built of enormous pine-logs on the traditional Scandinavian pattern. Two large rooms are separated by a central corridor leading to a shed in which are sheltered the boats, the fishing gear, and the piles of *dorsels*, the small codfish of Norway and Iceland. These, after being dried, are put on the market under the name of 'roundfish' and 'stockfish.'

Each of the two rooms serves both as parlour and bedroom. A sort of chest of drawers let into the wooden walls holds the bedding, consisting of a mattress and some skin coverings which appear only at night-time. This arrangement, along with the clear colours of the panels and the gaiety of the tall fire-place in the corner, where a great wood fire is always burning, gives to the humblest dwelling an air of cleanliness and domestic luxury unknown to the peasants of southern Europe.

That evening the whole family was gathered round the hearth, where a colossal saucepan, containing a mixture of *sill-sallat* or smoked herring, salmon, and potatoes. Captain Hersebom, sitting in a tall wooden armchair, was making a net, according to his invariable custom when he was not at sea or in the drying-room. He was a courageous fisherman, his face weather-beaten by the polar gales and his hair already greying although he was still in the prime of life.

His son Otto, a tall lad of fourteen, who resembled him in everything and who like him seemed destined to become a consummate fisherman, was at the moment engaged in delving into the mysteries of the rule of three, covering a small slate with figures, and his great paw giving the impression that it better understood how to manipulate an oar.

Erik, leaning over the dinner table, was engrossed in reading a large history book, lent him by Herr Malarius. Beside him the good wife, Katrina Hersebom, was busy at her spinning-wheel, while little Vanda, a fair-haired girl of ten to twelve years, was diligently knitting a great red-wool stocking. At her feet a huge yellow-white dog, its fur as thick as a sheep, was asleep curled up in a ball.

For at least an hour the silence had not been broken, and the copper lamp, fed by fish-oil, was quietly lighting up, with its four burners, every detail of the peaceful interior.

To tell the truth, the silence seemed to be weighing rather heavily on Fru Katrina. For some moments she had displayed several tokens of a desire to unloose her tongue.

At last she could stand it no longer. 'That's enough work for the evening,' she decided 'It's time to lay the supper-table.'

Without a word of protest Erik, picking up his great book, settled down nearer the fireplace, while Vanda, after putting down her knitting, went towards the sideboard and devoted herself to setting out the plates and forks.

'And you were saying, Otto,' the housewife continued, 'that our Erik answered the Herr Doctor nicely?'

'Answered him nicely!' Otto repeated enthusiastically 'He spoke like a book and that's the truth! I don't know where he found everything he knows. The more the doctor asked him, the more he found to say! His words kept coming, coming. And Herr Malarius was so pleased!'

'And I'm so pleased, too,' little Vanda answered quite seriously.

'Oh, we're all pleased, of course! Oh, Mother, if you'd only seen him, with all the rest of them listening with their mouths open! There was only one thing that scared us that our turn would come next! But he wasn't afraid at all, he answered the doctor just as he would our own schoolmaster!'

'Well, Herr Malarius is as good as the doctor, I hope, and

he knows as much as anybody!' Erik seemed to be bored with these praises.

The old fisherman gave an approving smile. 'You're quite right, my boy,' he said, without checking the movement of his horny hands, 'Herr Malarius could teach every doctor in the town, if he ever wanted to. And at any rate he doesn't use his knowledge to ruin poor people!'

'Has Doctor Schwaryencrona ruined anyone?' Erik showed real surprise.

'Um . . . well . . . If he hasn't done so, it isn't his fault! But I—I myself—do you think I was pleased to see that factory being put up, the one that's smoking down there beside the fiord? Mother will tell you how at one time we used to extract the oil ourselves and send it to Bergen, for a hundred and fifty or two hundred kroners a year. But now all that's finished! Nobody sells the crude oil anymore, for we get so little for it that it's hardly worth while going to sea! We have to be satisfied with selling cod livers to the factory and God knows if the manager doesn't understand how to get it cheap! Why, I can scarcely cover forty-five kroners, though it gives me three times more trouble than it did! Well . . . I say that it isn't right, and that the doctor would do better to look after his patients at Stockholm than to come here and do our work for us and take the bread out of our mouths!'

These bitter words were followed by silence. For some moments nothing could be heard except the clatter of the plates which Vanda was laying out while her mother emptied the contents of the saucepan into an enormous dish of glazed earthenware.

Erik pondered deeply over what Captain Hersebom had just said. Objections teemed into his mind, and as he was candour itself he could not help from putting them into words.

'I think you're quite right Father, in regretting the profits you used to make,' he said, 'but it isn't right to accuse doctor Schwaryencrona of having reduced them. Isn't his oil better than the sort you used to make at home?'

'Um . . . well . . . It's clearer, that's all . . . And by what people say, it doesn't smell of resin, as ours did! And that's why all the pretty ladies in the towns prefer it, no doubt! But

devil take it if it's any better for the lungs than the good old oil we used to make!'

'Still, for some reason or other, people seem to prefer it! And as it's a very good medicine, the public don't want to find it any nastier than they have to whenever they take it! Anyhow if a doctor manages to make his medicine seem less nasty by finding some new way of preparing it, isn't it his duty to use it?'

Captain Hersebon scratched his ear. 'I dare say' he admitted regretfully, 'that may be his duty as a doctor. But that's no reason for keeping poor folks from earning a living.'

'I'm told that the doctor's factory is finding work for three hundred, when there weren't twenty in Noroë in the days you're talking about.' Erik protested timidly.

'Well, that's it, that's why our work isn't worth anything now!' Hersebon exclaimed.

'Come on! The soup's ready, so sit down, all of you!' put in Fru Katrina, who could see that the discussion was getting more heated than she liked.

Realising that further insistence would be out of place, Erik took his usual seat beside Vanda.

'The doctor and Herr Malarius seem on very good terms, so I suppose they're old friends?' he asked, to change the subject.

'No doubt about that' the fisherman replied as he took his place at the table 'They were both born in Noroë, and I can still remember the time when they used to play in the school playground, although they were older than me by about ten years. Herr Malarius was the son of our old doctor, the doctor was simply the son of a fisherman. But he's gone a long way since then!'

And with that aphorism, the good fellow was getting ready to dig his spoon into the plate of fish and potatoes when a knock at the door stopped him in the act.

'May I come in, Captain Hersebon?' A strong but musical voice resounded in the corridor.

And without waiting for a reply, the person to whom the voice belonged came into the room, bringing with him a great gust of icy air.

'Herr Doctor Schwaryencrona!' the three children ex-

claimed, while their father and mother hastily rose to their feet.

'My dear Hersebom!' said the savant, as he took the fisherman's hand, 'we haven't seen one another for many a long year. But I've never forgotten your dear old father, and I thought I could look in on you as one of your oldest friends!'

The worthy man, a little troubled no doubt by the memory of the accusations he had just been making against his visitor, hardly knew how to reply. So he contented himself with returning the doctor's grasp with a welcoming smile, while his wife bustled hastily about.

'Quick, Otto, Erik, help the Herr Doctor take off his overcoat! Vanda, another plate!' she said, as hospitable as are all the Norwegian housewives. 'Would the Herr Doctor favour us by sharing a bite with us?'

'Indeed I wouldn't be able to say no, believe me, if I had any appetite, for here's a very tempting dish of salmon! But it isn't an hour since I supped with my friend Malarius, and I certainly wouldn't have come so soon if I'd thought you were still at the table. If you want to please me very much, you'll sit down again and carry on just as if I weren't here!'

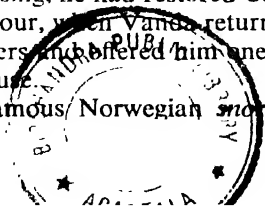
'Oh, Herr Doctor,' the housewife besought him 'at least you'll take some *snorgas* and a cup of tea?'

'We'll settle for a cup of tea, but on condition that you finish your dinner first,' the doctor insisted, as he sat down in the great armchair.

At once Vanda quietly put the kettle on the stove and vanished like a fairy into the next room, while the whole family, realising with their native courtesy that it would embarrass their guest to insist further, set themselves to attack the food.

In two minutes the doctor was quite at his ease. While he poked the fire and toasted his toes at the flames from the dry wood which Katrina had just thrown upon it, he gossiped about old times, and about the changes in the countryside and in Bergen itself. He had made himself quite at home, and, what was more surprising, he had restored Captain Hersebom to his usual good humour, when Vanda returned with a wooden tray laden with saucers and offered him one so politely that he felt he could not refuse.

It was the famous Norwegian *snorgas*—strips of smoked



reindeer, filleted herrings with red pepper, thin slices of black bread, cheese with pimento dressing, and other fierce condiments which are eaten at all hours of the day to work up an appetite.

They fulfilled their purpose so well that the doctor, who had tasted them only out of politeness, found himself in a condition to do honour to the jam made of wild raspberries which was Fru Katrina's special glory, and was seized with a thirst which seven or eight cups of tea would hardly have been enough to appease.

Captain Hersebom next produced a jar of excellent *schiedum* which had just been sent him by a Dutch customer. Then, supper at last being over, the doctor accepted from his host's hand an enormous pipe which he filled and smoked to the general satisfaction.

Needless to add that by the end of these operations the ice had long been broken and that the doctor seemed always to have been part of the family. They laughed, they chatted, they were the best friends in the world, when ten was struck by the old clock in its case of varnished wood.

'Look, friends, how late it is,' exclaimed the doctor. 'Now if you'd care to send the children to bed, we can talk about something more serious.'

At a gesture from Katrina, Otto, Erik and Vanda at once said good evening and vanished from the room.

'You must be wondering why I've come?' the doctor continued after a moment's silence, as he fixed a penetrating glance upon Captain Hersebom.

'My guest is always welcome,' the fisherman replied sententially.

'Yes, I know, I know that hospitality's never lacking in Noroë. But you must have told yourselves anyhow that I must have had a motive for leaving my old friend's company and looking in on you like this! And I'd wager that Fru Hersebom isn't without her suspicions of why I've come.'

'We'll know why it is when you tell us,' was the housewife's diplomatic reply.

'Oh well,' sighed the doctor, 'as you won't help me I've got to get to the point myself! Your son Erik is a very remarkable boy, Captain Hersebom.'

'I've nothing to complain of,' the fisherman replied.

'He's unusually intelligent and well-informed for his age,' the doctor continued. 'I examined him today at the school, and I was much struck with the unusual capacity for work and thought that the examination disclosed! I was struck, too, as soon as I heard his name, to see how very unlike you he is in the face and how little he resembles the children of this country!'

The fisherman and his wife stayed silent and motionless.

'In short,' the savant continued not without impatience 'that child doesn't only interest me—he intrigues me. I've spoken about him to Malarius, and I've learned that he isn't your own son, that some shipwreck cast him up on our shores, and that you welcomed him, brought him up, and adopted him even to the extent of giving him your own name! All that's true enough, isn't it?'

'Yes, Herr Doctor,' Hersebom replied gravely.

'If he isn't our own child by blood, he is in our hearts and our affection,' exclaimed Katrina, her eyes moist and her lips trembling. 'Between him and Otto and Vanda we've never made the slightest difference! We've never even thought of reminding ourselves that there was any difference!'

'Your feelings do honour to you both,' the doctor was greatly moved by her agitation. 'But please, my friends, tell me the child's history. I came here to know it, and I only mean well by him, I can assure you of that.'

The fisherman scratched his ear and seemed to hesitate for a moment. But, seeing that the Doctor was impatiently waiting, he at last made up his mind to speak.

'It is just as you say, and the child isn't my own son,' he said in regretful tones. 'It was about a dozen years ago when I went off to fish on the far side of the islet which hides the entrance to the fiord from the open sea! As you know, there's a sand-bank there and the cod are very abundant.

'After a fairly good day, I was taking up my last lines and just going to hoist my sail, when I saw something floating on the water towards the setting sun about a mile away—something white which attracted my attention. The sea was calm, and I was in no hurry to get back home. So instead of turning

my prow towards Noroë, I felt inquisitive enough to make for that white object and to see what it was.

'In ten minutes I'd got up to it. The object which was floating there, which the rising tide was carrying towards the coast, was a little cradle of wickerwork, wrapped up in a muslin cloth and tied securely on to a buoy.

'I got within reach of it with feelings you will understand: I caught hold of the buoy, I dragged it out of the water, and then I could see that inside the cradle was a poor little baby of seven or eight months who was sleeping with clenched fists! It was palish-looking and cold, but it didn't seem to have suffered from its adventurous voyage, to judge by the way it started squalling when it woke up, feeling that it wasn't being rocked by the waves.

'We already had our Otto, so I knew how to keep these brats in order. So I hurriedly made a dummy with a bit of rag, and I dipped it in some water with a drop of *branvin* and gave it to him to suck. He calmed down at once and really seemed to enjoy it, but I had an idea that it wouldn't satisfy him for long. Anyhow I hadn't anything more pressing to do than to get back to Noroë.

'Naturally, I'd taken the cradle off the buoy and put it by my feet down in the bottom of the boat. While I held the sheet, I watched the poor little thing, and wondered how he could possibly have got there. From the wreck of a ship, no doubt! The sea had been very rough during the night, the wind had been blowing like a hurricane, and such disasters must have been counted by dozens.

'But through what circumstances had that child escaped the fate of those who were looking after him? How had anybody thought of attaching him to a buoy? How long had he been floating there on the crest of the waves? What had become of his father and mother, and all those who loved him? So many questions which must always stay unanswered, for the poor child was in no position to reply!

'To cut a long story short, I was back home half an hour later, and handed my find over to Katrina! At that time we had a cow, and it at once became the child's nurse. He was so lovely, so happy, so pink, w'en he'd had a stomachful of milk and been warmed at the fire that, my word, we began to

love him as if he were one of our own children! So there we are! We kept him, we brought him up, and we've never made any distinction between him and our own children. That's true, isn't it, wife?' he added turning towards Katrina.

'Of course it is, the poor little thing!' the housewife wiped her eyes, which the recollection had filled with tears. 'And he really is our child now, because we adopted him! I don't know why Herr Malarius should have said anything!' And, sincerely indignant, the housewife turned her spinning-wheel with renewed energy.

'That's true,' Hersebom rallied to her support, 'and is that anybody else's business except our own?'

'No, no,' the doctor replied in conciliatory tones, 'but you mustn't accuse Malarius of any indiscretion. It was I who was struck by the boy's appearance and I asked him, in confidence, to tell me his history. Malarius did not fail to let me know that Erik believes he's your own son, and that nobody in Noroë remembers how he came here. And you can see for yourselves that I took care not to speak in front of the boy, and that I started by sending him to bed, along with his brother and sister. You say that he was about seven or eight months old when you rescued him?'

'Very nearly. He had four teeth, the rascal, and I can tell you that it wasn't long before he started using them!' Hersebom laughed.

'Oh, he was a lovely child!' put in Katrina. 'Fair, strong, with a nice broad back. And his arms and legs! You ought to have seen them!'

'How was he dressed?'

Hersebom did not reply, but his wife showed less discretion, 'Like a little prince!' she exclaimed. 'Just imagine, Herr Doctor, a quilted coat trimmed with lace, a pelisse lined with satin—a king's son couldn't have had anything better—a little plaited bonnet, a white velvet hood! Oh, it was all so lovely! Still, you can judge for yourself, for I've kept it all carefully. You can well believe we weren't used to dressing a baby like that! I put him into the little things I'd got for Otto; I'd kept them, and they did later for Vanda! But we've still got his trousseau, and I'm going to show it to you.'

As she spoke, the good woman had knelt before an oak

chest with an old-fashioned lock. She lifted its lid and began to rummage into one of its compartments.

One by one she produced the articles she had described, and spread them out proudly beneath the doctor's eyes, along with some other clothes of fine quality, a bib richly trimmed with lace, a little silk coverlet, a pair of wool socks. All these garments bore a cipher elegantly embroidered with the initials 'E.D.' as the doctor saw at once.

'E.D. —was that why you called him Erik?' he asked.

'Yes,' Katrina replied: exhibiting these articles seemed to have filled her with joy, although it had made her husband's face darken. 'And here's the finest of all, the one he had round his neck,' she added, as she took from his hiding-place a teething-ring of gold and red coral, hanging from a fine chain.

Upon this the initials 'E.D.' were surrounded by a Latin motto: '*Semper idem.*'

'We thought at first that it was the baby's name,' she continued, as she saw the doctor deciphering it, 'But Herr Malarius told us what it means, "Always the same."'

'Herr Malarius was quite right,' the doctor replied, for this was evidently an indirect question. 'It's quite clear that the child belonged to a rich and distinguished family,' he added, while Katrina replaced the whole layette in the chest. 'You've no idea what country he could have come from?'

'How could I possibly know that?' Hersebom asked, 'It was out of the sea that I fished him.'

'Yes, but you told me the cradle was fastened to a buoy, and it's usual, in every navy there is, to mark the buoy with the name of the ship it belongs to,' the doctor retorted, as he again fixed his piercing eyes on those of the seaman.

'Of course,' the latter admitted, lowering his head.

'Well, what name was that buoy marked with?'

'Good Lord, Herr Doctor, I'm not a scholar myself. I can read my own language a bit, but when it comes to foreign languages, good evening . . . And besides, it was so long ago!'

'Still, you ought to be able to remember it a little . . . And no doubt you showed the buoy, like the other things, to Herr Malarius? Come on, Captain Hersebom, make an effort! That name marked on the buoy—was it "*Cynthia*"?'

'I suppose it was something of the sort,' the fisherman replied a little vaguely.

'That's a foreign name! Now what country would you think, Captain Hersebom?'

'And how should I know! Do I know about every devil of a country? Have I ever gone any distance away from Noroë and Bergen, if it wasn't once or twice to fish off Iceland or Greenland?' the good fellow's voice was getting more and more surly.

'I should think it's either an English or a German name,' suggested the doctor without seeming to notice. 'It would be easy to decide from the shape of the letters, if I'd seen the buoy. You haven't kept it?'

'My word, no! It's a long time since it got burnt!' Hersebom retorted triumphantly.

'According to what Malarius remembers, they were Roman letters,' the doctor seemed to be talking to himself, 'and the cipher on the linen is certainly in Roman. So it's quite likely that the *Cynthia* wasn't a German ship, but British. I should incline to think it was British. Isn't that your own opinion, Captain Hersebom?'

'Well, that's something I've never worried about!' the fisherman replied. 'Whether it was English or Russian, or Patagonian, that's the least of my troubles! It's a long time since it revealed its secret to the ocean!' It might well have been believed that Captain Hersebom was delighted to know that the secret was sunk deep within the sea.

'Still, you can't have omitted to have made a few attempts to find the child's family?' the doctor asked him, while his spectacles seemed to glow ironically. 'You must have written to the authorities at Bergen, or put a notice in the papers?'

'Me!' the fisherman exclaimed, 'I never did anything of the sort. God knew where the baby came from, and what did that matter to me? Had I got any money to spend trying to find people who cared so little about him? Put yourself in my place, Herr Doctor. I'm not a millionaire, anyhow. And to be sure if we'd spent everything we had, we shouldn't have found out anything! We did our best, we brought up the little thing as though he were our own, we've loved him, cherished him.'

'Even more than the two others, if that were possible!

Katrina broke in, wiping her eyes with the corner of her apron. 'If we've got anything to reproach ourselves with, it's of having given him too much of our love!'

'Fru Hersebom, you won't be so harsh as to think that your kindness to the poor little castaway fills me with anything than the heartiest admiration!' the doctor protested. 'No, you mustn't think any such thing! But if I have to speak quite frankly, I think that your love for him has blinded you to your duty! And that would have been, first and foremost, to do your utmost to find out who his family were!'

There was a long silence.

'Yes, that may be so!' Captain Hersebom had bowed his head at this reproach. 'But what's done is done! Now our Erik is really ours, and I don't want to tell him these old stories.

'Never fear, it isn't I who'll betray your confidence!' the doctor assured them as he rose. 'It's getting late, so I'm going to leave you now, my good friends, and I'm going to wish you good-night—and a night without any regrets,' he concluded in very serious tones.

Thereupon he pulled on his fur overcoat, and without accepting the offer of the fisherman to see him home, he exchanged a hearty handshake with his hosts and strode off towards the factory.

Hersebom paused for an instant on the threshold, watching him walking off in the moon light. 'Devil of a man!' he murmured between his teeth, when he at last made up his mind to shut the door.

CHAPTER III

CAPTAIN HERSEBOM THINKS IT OVER

NEXT MORNING Dr. Schwaryencrona, after making a thorough inspection of the factory, was having lunch with his manager, when he saw entering somebody in whom he had at first great difficulty in recognising Captain Hersebom. Clad in full ceremonial dress, his big embroidered waistcoat and fur-trimmed frock-coat, and capped with his high-crowned

chimney-pot hat, the fisherman had changed greatly since wearing his working-dress. But what really transformed him was the profound sadness and humility of his face. His eyes were red, and he did not seem to have slept all night.

That indeed was the truth. Captain Hersebom, who hitherto had not had the slightest reproach from his conscience, had spent many sad hours on his leather mattress. Towards morning he had exchanged unhappy thoughts with Fru Katrina, who likewise had not closed an eye.

'Wife, I've been thinking about what the doctor told us!' he had exclaimed after a few sleepless hours.

'I've been thinking about it, too, ever since he left,' the good housewife replied.

'To my mind there was some truth in what he said, and we've been more selfish than we realised! Who knows if the child hasn't a right to some fortune of which our negligence has deprived him? Who knows if he hasn't been wept for over twelve years by some family who'd have the right to accuse us of never having tried to restore him to them?'

'That's exactly what I keep telling myself,' Katrina sighed. 'If his mother is still alive, poor woman, what terrible distress it must give her to think that her son has been drowned! I put myself in her place, and I fancy we'd lost our little Otto! Never should we be able to console ourselves!'

'His mother isn't all I'm distressed about,' Hersebom continued after a moment's silence 'for to all appearances she must be dead. How could we think that a child of that age could be travelling without her, or that he could be tied to a buoy and left to the tender mercies of the ocean if she were still alive?'

'That's true. But, after all, what do we know about it? She may have escaped by some miracle!'

'And perhaps someone took her child away from her! That's an idea that's come to me more than once,' Hersebom reflected. 'Who told us that somebody hadn't an interest in getting him out of the way? To expose him on a buoy like that was such an extraordinary thing to do that anything seems possible. And if so, we've made ourselves the accomplices in a crime and helped it to be carried out. That's terrible to think of.'

'Who could have imagined that, when we thought we'd done such a fine work of charity by adopting the poor little thing?'

'Oh, it's quite clear that we had no evil intention! We've brought him up and educated him as best we could. That doesn't keep us from having acted very stupidly, and perhaps one of these days the child will have the right to reproach us!'

'We needn't be afraid of that, I'm sure! But it's still too much to have something to reproach ourselves with.'

'Isn't it strange that the same action, looked at from a different point of view, can be judged in such different ways! Never could I so much as imagined such a thing! And a few words from the doctor were enough to turn my brain upside down!'

Thus these good people had discussed it

The result of this exchange of their nocturnal reflections was that Captain Hersebom went to consult Dr. Schwaryencrona, to ask what he could possibly do to repair the past error.

The doctor did not at first think that he ought to repeat what he had said the night before. He welcomed the fisherman very cordially, discussed Herr Malarius' school, and pretended to regard the visit as a mere act of politeness.

This did not at all suit Captain Hersebom, who began to skirt round the subject he had in his mind; he spoke of Herr Malarius' school, and at last decided to make the plunge.

'Herr Doctor,' he said, at last coming out into the open, 'my wife and I have been thinking all night about what you said yesterday regarding that child. We never thought we were doing wrong in bringing him up as one of our own! But you've changed our minds for us, and I want to know what you'd advise us to do not to go on sinning in ignorance. Perhaps there's still time to look for Erik's family?'

'It's never too late to do one's duty,' the doctor replied 'although, to be sure, it will be much more complicated now than it would have been at the outset. Would you like to leave it to me? I'll undertake it with pleasure, and I promise you I'll carry it out with all the diligence that's needed—but on one condition: that you entrust the child to me at the same time, to take him to Stockholm.'

The blow of a club falling on Captain Hersebom's head would not have stunned him more. He turned pale and looked visibly uneasy.

'Entrust Erik to you? To take him to Stockholm? But why, Herr Doctor?' he asked in a changed voice.

'I'm going to tell you. What drew my attention to that child wasn't only the physical characters which distinguish him at sight from his comrades. It was his keen intelligence, his obvious vocation for advanced studies. Before we can know by what series of chances he came to be washed up at Noroë, I told myself that it would be a crime to leave so highly gifted a child in a village school, even under a master like Malarus—for he won't find anything there which could help him to develop his exceptional faculties, neither museums or scientific collections, nor libraries, nor fellow-students worthy of himself.

'That was what led me to enquire about Erik, to ask what was his history. Even before knowing it, I felt the keenest wish to get this child the advantages of a comprehensive education. You will easily understand that once I had the information you gave me, I was still more deeply attached to this plan. It certainly won't be the enquiry which I feel inclined to undertake that will make me change my mind.

'I need hardly remind you, Captain Hersebom, that it's obvious that your adopted son belongs to a rich distinguished family. Do you want me, if I find them, to bring them back a child brought up in a village and deprived of that education without which he'll be out of place in his new surroundings?'

Captain Hersebom lowered his head. Without his noticing it, two great tears rolled down his weatherbeaten cheeks.

'But all the same,' he protested, 'it will mean parting with him! Before even knowing whether he'll ever find another family, we've got to drive him out of the house! It's too much to ask me, Herr Doctor, too much to ask my wife! The child's so happy with us! Why not leave him there?—unless, that is, he's sure of a more brilliant fate?'

'Happy! And who told you he'll be happy later on? Who's to tell you that when he grows up, he won't regret having been saved? As intelligent a thinker as he may be my dear Hersebom, he'll stifle in the life you can give him at Noroë.'

‘My word, Doctor, this life that you disdain is good enough for us! And why not for the child?’

‘I don’t disdain it,’ the savant protested warmly. ‘Nobody admires and honours work more than I do! Do you think, Captain Hersebom, that I could ever forget whence I came? Father and grandfather were fishermen like you! And it’s just because they had the foresight to give me an education that I’m able to appreciate such a benefit at its real value. So I want to assure it for a boy who deserves it! Believe me, it’s only his own interest that sways me.’

‘Well, how am I to know? Erik will have got on nicely when you’ve turned him into a “gentleman” who won’t know how to use his hands! And if you don’t find his family, as seems most likely, since that was twelve years back, you’ll have done a nice thing for us! Look here, Herr Doctor, it’s a fine life a fisherman’s is, and it’s as good as any! With a fine boat beneath his feet, the fresh breeze in his hair, and four or five dozen cod deep down at the end of his lines, a Norwegian fisherman fears nothing, and he doesn’t owe anything to anyone! You tell me that Erik wouldn’t be happy in that life? Allow me to think otherwise! I know that boy quite well! He loves books, but he loves the sea above everything. Anybody would say he feels he’s been cradled by the sea, and all the museums in the world won’t console him for being away from it!’

‘We’ve got the sea at Stockholm, too,’ smiled the doctor; he was moved, in spite of himself, by this affectionate resistance.

‘Well,’ the fisherman crossed his arms. ‘What exactly do you want? What do you suggest, Herr Doctor?’

‘There, you can see that after all that you’ve got to do something. Well, this is what I suggest. Erik is twelve years old, nearly thirteen, and he seems to be an exceptionally gifted boy. It doesn’t matter where he comes from. Let’s put the question of his origin on one side. He deserves for us to give him the means of developing and using his faculties; that’s what we’re concerned with now.’

‘Well, I’m rich and I haven’t any children. I’ll undertake to supply him with those means, to give him the best masters and every facility for profiting from their lessons. The experiment will last two years. During that period I’ll get into action, I’ll

make enquiries, insert notices in the papers, I'll move heaven and earth to find his parents.

'If that doesn't happen in two years, it won't happen at all. Will his parents be found? Then, naturally, they'll decide what's to be done with him! Otherwise, I'll send Erik back to you. He'll be fifteen years old, he'll have seen the world. The time will have come to tell him the truth about his origin; then, with our advice and the judgment he'll have acquired, he can decide for himself what course to follow. If he wants to be a fisherman, it won't be me who'll oppose him! If he wants to push on with his studies, that will show that he's worthy of them, and I'll undertake to let him continue them, to open before him whatever profession he chooses. Doesn't all that seem reasonable.'

'It's more than reasonable, it's wisdom itself that flows from your mouth, Herr Doctor!' Captain Hersebom was overcome by these last arguments. 'That's what it means to have studied!' he added, shaking his head. 'You can have a nice game with an ignoramus like me! The difficulty will be to tell my wife all this! And will it be soon that you'll take him away?'

'Tomorrow! I can't put off my return to Stockholm for another day.'

The sigh Captain Hersebom gave resembled a sob. 'Tomorrow! That's quick work. Oh well, what is to be will be. I must go and have a word with my wife.'

'Of course. And ask Herr Malarius. You'll find that he agrees with me.'

'Oh, I should hardly doubt that,' the fisherman replied with a sad smile.

He shook the hand which Dr. Schwaryencrona held out to him, and went thoughtfully away.

In the evening, before dinner, the Doctor went to Captain Hersebom's dwelling. He found the family grouped round the hearth as before, but not the same atmosphere of quiet happiness. The father was sitting some distance away from the fire, silent and empty-handed. Katrina, her eyes filled with tears, was holding Erik's hand.

He, his cheeks flushed by the hope of his new destiny, and his look darkened by his distress at leaving those whom he

loved, hardly knew which of these feelings he ought to suppress. Little Vanda was hiding her face on the fisherman's knees. Nothing could be seen of her except her silver-blond pigtails, which fell heavily on her graceful shoulders. Otto, no less moved by the forthcoming separation, was standing motionless beside his adopted brother.

'How distressed you all seem to be!' exclaimed the doctor, as he paused on the threshold. 'If Erik were about to set off on the most distant and most dangerous expedition you could imagine, you couldn't be more unhappy! There's nothing of that sort, my good friends, I assure you! Stockholm isn't at the antipodes, and the boy isn't leaving you forever. He'll be able to write to you, and I don't doubt that he'll do so often! He's no different from the other boys who go off to college. In two years he'll be coming back to you, much bigger, fully grown and well educated, and with every accomplishment! Is that a thing to be so unhappy about? Quite seriously, it isn't reasonable.'

Katrina had risen with the dignity native to the peasants of the north. 'Herr Doctor,' she said, 'Heaven is my witness that I'm deeply grateful for all you've done for Erik. But that doesn't prevent us from being sad that he's leaving us. Hersebom has explained that we have to part. I agree. But don't expect us not to regret it.'

'Mother,' Erik exclaimed, 'I won't go at all if it distresses you so much!'

'No, my boy,' the good woman clasped him in her arms. 'Education is a blessing we haven't the right to refuse you. Now, my son, go and thank the doctor, who is to assure your future, and always show how you appreciate his kindness by your application to your studies.'

'Come, come!' replied the doctor, whose spectacles seemed to be blurred by an unaccountable cloud, 'do you want to make me unhappy, too? Let's talk about something practical. You realise of course, that it's a matter of going off tomorrow at daybreak, and you'll have everything ready? When I say everything, that doesn't mean that you'll need an elaborate outfit. We'll go by sledge as far as Bergen, and there we'll take the railway. Erik doesn't need anything except a change of linen, and he'll get all that's necessary at Stockholm.'

'Everything will be ready,' was Fru Hersebom's simple reply. 'Vanda,' she added, with Norwegian courtesy, 'the Herr Doctor is still on his feet.'

The little girl hastily thrust towards Dr. Schwaryencrona a large armchair of varnished oak.

'I must go,' the Doctor told them. 'Malarius is expecting me for dinner. Well, *flicka* (little girl)' he continued, laying his hand on the child's fair head, 'are you angry with me for taking your brother away?'

'No, Herr Doctor,' Vanda replied gravely. 'Erik will be happier down there. He wasn't made to stay in a village!'

'And you, little one, will you be unhappy without him?'

'The beach will be so lonely,' the child replied gently. 'The seagulls will look for him and not be able to find him. The little waves will be surprised not to see him, and the house will seem empty. But Erik will be happy, because he'll have his books and he'll become a wise man.'

'And his brave little sister will rejoice in his happiness, won't she, my child?' the doctor pressed a kiss on the girl's forehead. 'And she'll be so proud of him when he comes back! Well, so that's settled. And now I've got to hurry away Good-bye till tomorrow!'

'Herr Doctor,' Vanda murmured timidly, 'I'd like to ask you a favour.'

'What is it, *flicka*?'

'You're going off in a sledge, you told us? I'd like you, if father and mother agree, to let me drive you as far as the first stage.'

'Oh . . . ah . . . But I've already asked Regnild, my manager's daughter.'

'I know, she told me. But she'll willingly give up to me, if you'll be kind enough to let us!'

'Well, in that case, all you've got to do is to get your parent's permission.'

'They've given it.'

'Well, you've got mine too, my child,' the doctor agreed as he went off.

Next morning, when the big sledge drew up before the Hersebom dwelling, little Vanda, as she wished, climbed up into the seat and took the reins. She was going to drive them

to the next village, where the doctor would hire another horse and another little girl, and so on as far as Bergen. This unusual type of coachman would certainly have surprised a stranger; but it is customary in Sweden and Norway. The men would feel they were wasting their time in performing such duties, and it is not at all rare to entrust to children of ten or eleven the heavy vehicles which they know how to handle with the greatest ease.

The doctor was already installed within the vehicle, and well wrapped up in his furs. After tenderly kissing his father and brother good-bye, Erik took his place beside Vanda. They were content to express their emotion only by their sad silence, but the good Katrina was more expansive.

‘Good-bye, my son,’ she said through her tears. ‘Never forget what your poor parents have taught you! Be honest and brave! Never tell a lie. Do your best at your work. Always protect those who are weaker than yourself. And if you don’t find the happiness you deserve, come back and look for it with us!’

Vanda touched up the horse, which set off at a brisk trot, making its sledge-bells jingle. The air was cold and the way as hard as glass. Low down on the horizon a pale sun was throwing its golden mantle across the snowy landscape. In a few minutes Noroë had faded into the distance.

CHAPTER IV

IN STOCKHOLM

IN STOCKHOLM Dr. Schwaryencrona lived in a magnificent dwelling on Stadsholmen Island. This is ‘the most’ ancient and ‘the most’ sought-after quarter of that charming capital, one of ‘the most’ attractive and ‘the most’ amiable of Europe—one of those which strangers would visit ‘most’ frequently of all if fashion and prejudice hadn’t the same effect upon the travel plans of the commonplace tourist as upon the shape of his hat.

Placed between Lake Melar and the Baltic, on a group of eight islands connected by innumerable bridges, and lined with fine quays, livened up by the coming and going of the boats which take the place of the omnibus, by the gaiety of a hard-working and carefree population, the most hospitable, the politest, and the best educated in Europe, Stockholm, with its great public gardens, its museums, its scientific institutions, is not only an extremely important commercial centre but a veritable Athens of the North.

Yet Erik was still under the impression which Vanda had left with him when they parted after the first stage. Their farewells had been more serious than might have been expected from their age; these young hearts had not been able to conceal their deep emotion from one another.

But when the vehicle which had come to wait for him at the station stopped in front of a great house built of red bricks, its broad windows resplendent with gas-light, Eric was amazed. The copper door-knocker seemed like the finest gold. The hall, with its marble-paving and its statues and bronze candelabra and large Chinese vases, left him dumbfounded. While a footman in livery helped his master off with his furs while asking after his health with that cordiality which is customary among the Swedish domestics, Erik cast bewildered glances around him.

The sound of voices drew his attention to the broad oak staircase, with its covering of thick carpet. Turning round, he saw two people, clad in what seemed to him the last word in elegance.

One was a grey-haired lady of medium height, who held herself bolt upright in a dress of black pleated cloth, enough to give a glimpse of her red stockings with yellow clocks and her buckled shoes. An enormous bunch of keys was secured by a steel chain hanging from her girdle. She held her head high and cast quick piercing glances around her. This was Fru Greta-Maria, the doctor's housekeeper, the undisputed autocrat of the household in all culinary and domestic matters.

Behind her came a small girl of eleven or twelve years, who seemed to the eyes of Erik like a fairy princess. Instead of the national costume, the only one he had ever seen worn by a girl of that age, she was clad in a dark blue satin dress, on

which her golden hair hung in silken tresses; she was shod in black stockings and satin slippers; a knot of cherry-coloured ribbon, perched on her head like a butterfly, livened up with its bright colour a strange pale face, whose green eyes shone with a phosphorescent glow.

'How lovely, Uncle, to see you back home at last! Have you had a pleasant journey?' she exclaimed, rushing forward to throw her arms round his neck.

Scarcely did she deign to glance at Erik, who stood modestly on one side.

The doctor returned her kisses and shook hands with the housekeeper; then he signed to his protégé to come forward.

'Kajsa, and you, Mrs. Greta, I ask your good offices on behalf of Erik, whom I've brought from Norway,' he said, 'And don't be frightened, my boy,' he continued in kind tones, 'Fru Greta isn't as severe as she seems, and my niece Kajsa will soon be on good terms with you! Isn't that true, my dear?' he added, as he gently pinched her cheek.

The little fairy's only response was to make a disdainful face. As for the housekeeper, she did not seem over enthusiastic for the new recruit who had just been introduced to her.

'Well, Herr Doctor,' she replied rather peevishly, 'and may I ask, if you please, who exactly this child is?'

'Certainly,' the doctor assured her, 'you'll be told all about it before long, Fru Greta, so don't be afraid! But, if it is convenient to yourself, we'll first have something to eat.'

In the dining-room the table was already laid; upon it a fine crystal service and an array of *snorgas* were displayed upon a white cloth. This was a luxury of which poor Erik had never had the faintest notion, for table-linen is unknown among the Norwegian peasants; plates have only appeared quite recently and many of the people eat their fish on rounds of black bread and don't find that too bad.

So the doctor's invitation had to be repeated before the poor boy sat at the table, where the clumsiness of his movements drew on the part of Fröken Kajsa more than one ironical glance. But, aided by the appetite that comes from travelling, things did not go off too badly. To the *snorgas* succeeded a dinner which would have appalled a French stomach by its solid bulk, which might well have been abundant enough to

appease the hunger of a battalion of infantry after a route-march of fifteen miles: fish soup, home-made bread, goose stuffed with chestnuts, boiled beef flanked by a mountain of vegetables, a pyramid of potatoes, hard-boiled eggs by the dozen, pudding with a bunch of raisins—all was valiantly attacked and demolished.

This ample meal having ended without a word being said, the guests adjourned to the parlour, a great wood-panelled room with six windows, whose embrasures, closed by thick cloth curtains, would have enabled a French architect to build a complete apartment in each. The doctor sat beside the fire in a great leather armchair; Kajsa installed herself on a footstool at his feet, while Erik, scared and ill at ease, went off to one of the windows and wished he could take refuge in the shadowy depths of its retreat. But the doctor gave him no time.

‘Well, my boy, come and warm yourself,’ he exclaimed in his deep voice, ‘and tell us what you think of Stockholm?’

‘The streets are very dark and narrow, and the houses are very high,’ Erik ventured.

‘Yes, a little higher than in Noroë,’ laughed the doctor.

‘They spoil the view of the stars,’ the boy commented.

‘It’s because here we’re in the noble quarter,’ Kajsa was annoyed at his criticism, ‘You’ve only got to go across the bridges to come to wider streets.’

‘I saw them coming from the station, but the finest isn’t so wide as Noroë fiord!’ Erik retorted.

‘Aha!’ the doctor smiled, ‘have we started getting homesick already?’

‘No,’ Erik replied firmly, ‘I’m too grateful to you, Doctor, to regret having come here for a moment. But you asked me what I thought of Stockholm, and I told you.’

‘Noroë must be a frightful little hole,’ snapped Kajsa.

‘A frightful little hole!’ Erik repeated indignantly. ‘Those who say such things can’t have any eyes. Fröken Kajsa! If you could only see the granite circle which the rocks form round our fiord, and our mountains, our glaciers, our pine-forests black against the blue sky! And further out the great sea, now tumultuous and terrible, now gentle as if it were getting ready to rock you to sleep. And the flights of seagulls which soar

by, vanish into the distance, and return to brush you with their wings. Oh, all that's so lovely, you know, much more lovely than the town!'

'I wasn't talking about the scenery, only the houses,' Kajsa retorted. 'They're only peasants' huts, aren't they, Onkel?'

'Peasants' huts, in which your father and your grandfather were born, just as I was, child,' the doctor spoke very seriously.

Kajsa blushed and held her tongue.

'They're only wooden houses,' Erik continued, 'But they're as good as any others. Often during the evenings, while father's mending his nets and mother's spinning at her wheel, we sit down, all three of us, on a little form, Otto, Vanda, and me, with our big dog Klaas at our feet, and we repeat the old sagas together while we watch the shadows playing on the ceiling. And when the wind blows outdoors, and all the fisherman have come home, it's lovely to feel ourselves all snugly indoors! Yes, we're as happy there as in a fine big room like this.'

'But it isn't the finest room,' Kajsa boasted. 'I could show you our big drawing-room, and then you'd see!'

'But there are so many books here!' Erik replied. 'Are there more than these in the drawing-room?'

'Books are all very well! But who's talking about them? I'm talking about velvet armchairs, lace curtains, the big French clock, Turkey carpets!'

Erik did not seem much enthused by this enumeration, and he cast an envious glance towards the great oak bookcase which filled one side of the room.

'You can go and look at those books, and choose any one of them you like,' the doctor told him.

Erik did not have to be told twice. He chose a volume; then, sitting down in a corner where the light was good, he was soon absorbed in his reading. He scarcely noticed the successive entrances of two elderly gentlemen, faithful cronies of Dr. Schwaryencrona, who came every evening to take a hand at whist.

The first was Professor Hochstedt. He was a tall old man with rather cold and impressive manners, who very ceremoniously expressed the pleasure he felt at seeing the doctor return.

Scarcely had he taken his seat in what through long custom had come to be known as 'the professor's armchair' when the bell gave a firm decisive ring.

'Here's Bredejord!' the two friends exclaimed together.

The door at once opened in front of a dapper little man. Entering like a gust of wind, he shook both hands of the doctor, pressed a kiss on Kajsa's forehead, exchanged an affectionate greeting with the professor, and shot around the parlour a brilliant glance like that of a mouse. The new-comer was Herr Bredejord, one of the ornaments of the legal profession of Stockholm.

'Well, what have we got here?' he asked the moment he caught sight of Erik. 'A young cod-fisher—Or should we say a Bergen cabin-boy? And reading Gibbon in English!' With a glance he took in the title of the book which was absorbing this little peasant's attention. 'That interests you, my boy?' he asked.

'Yes, sir, it's a work I've been wanting to read for a long time, the first volume of the *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*.' Erik replied naively.

'The devil!' the lawyer exclaimed. 'These Bergen cabin-boys seem to take their reading seriously! But do you come from Bergen?' he asked.

'I'm from Noroë, which isn't far away from Bergen,' Erik told him.

'Aha! Are brown hair and eyes like yours so very common in Noroë?'

'No, sir. My brother and my sister and the others are blonds, almost like this young lady,' Erik assured him. 'But they don't dress like her,' he added with a smile. 'So they don't look much like her.'

'No, I don't suppose they do.' Herr Bredejord agreed. 'Fröken Kajsa is a product of civilisation. Down there, it's nature "most adorned when unadorned." But what have you come to Stockholm for, my boy, if I'm not being too inquisitive?'

'The Herr Doctor is being kind enough to send me to College.'

'Aha!' the lawyer tapped his snuff-box with the tip of his fingers, and his keen glance seemed to be asking the doctor

about this living problem. But an almost imperceptible sign made him realise that this enquiry would have to be adjourned, and so he changed the subject.

The conversation turned to the court and the town, to the events that had taken place since the doctor left. Then Fru Greta came to open the card-table and to set out the cards and the counters. And soon silence fell, while the three friends plunged into the intricate combinations of whist.

The Doctor made the innocent claim to be extremely good at the game, and he had the less innocent custom of showing himself pitiless to the other players' occasional errors. He never failed to exult noisily when such errors helped him to win, and to grumble when they made him lose, and after every rubber he gave himself the pleasure of explaining to the delinquent the exact nature of his sin, which card he ought to have played after this lead, what return he ought to have made after that. This is a whim fairly common among whist-players, but one which is not too admirable when it degenerates into a mania and claims the same victims evening after evening.

Happily for himself, the doctor had to deal with two friends who always withstood him—the professor by his unassailable coldness and the lawyer by his cheerful scepticism.

'You're quite right,' the former used to reply gravely even to the most bitter reproaches.

'My dear Schwaryencrona, you know quite well that you're wasting your pains sermonising me!' laughed Herr Bredejord. 'All my life I make the greatest possible mistakes when I play whist, and the worst of it is I'm never sorry for them!'

What could be done with such hardened sinners? The doctor found he had to keep his comments to himself; but this was only to renew them a quarter of an hour later, for he was incorrigible.

Chance had it that very evening that he should lose every game. So his bad temper vented itself in the hardest strictures on the professor, on the lawyer, and even on the dummy, when that imaginary personage failed to have as many trumps as the doctor thought he had a right to expect.

But the professor imperturbably reckoned up his score, and the lawyer made only facetious replies to the most bitter criticisms: 'Why do you expect me to change my ways, when I

win by playing badly, when you lose by playing properly?' he asked the doctor.

At ten o'clock Kajsa made the tea in a magnificent copper samover and served it very gracefully; then she discreetly vanished. Then Fru Greta came to call Erik and to show him the room assigned to him—a pretty little room, white and clean, on the second floor of the house—and the three friends found themselves alone.

'Now perhaps at last you'll tell us who is this fisher-boy from Noroë who reads Gibbon in the original?' asked Herr Bredejord as he put the sugar into his second cup of tea. 'Or is that subject to be carefully avoided in case we should be indiscreet?'

'There's no mystery about it, and I'll gladly tell you Erik's story, if you think you can keep it to yourselves,' Doctor Schwaryencrona still showed a touch of resentment.

'Aha, I knew very well there was some secret attached to it,' smiled the lawyer, as he settled himself down comfortably in an armchair. 'We're listening to you, my good friend, and be sure that your confidence won't be misplaced! I can tell you that this young gentleman already intrigues me as a problem.'

'He's certainly a living problem,' agreed the doctor, flattered by his friend's curiosity, 'a problem to which I dare to say I think I've quite probably found the solution. I'm going to lay all the facts before you, and then you can tell me if your solution agrees with mine.'

He sat down near the great earthenware stove, and explained how he had been led to take special notice of Erik in Noroë school and to make enquiries about him. He told them, without omitting any of the details, what he had learned from Herr Malarius and Captain Hersebom. He mentioned the buoy which bore the name *Cynthia*, the tiny garments which Katrina had shown him, the cipher they were embroidered with, the coral teething-ring with its motto, and, finally, the ethnographical characters which Erik so clearly displayed.

'You now have all the elements of the problem just as it confronts me,' he continued. 'But I must impress it upon you that the knowledge the child possesses is only a secondary phenomenon, due to the intervention of Herr Malarius,

and mustn't be taken too seriously. It was this which first made me notice him and led me to make enquiries about him. It really plays only a minor part in the question I ask myself! Where did that child come from? Where must we look in the hope of discovering his family?'

'The real elements of the problem, the only ones which could guide us, are:

'First: The physical indication of the child's race:

'Second: The name *Cynthia* inscribed on the buoy.

'Upon the first heading, no doubt is possible: the child belongs to the Celtic race. He represents the typical Celt in all its beauty and purity.

'Let's get on to the second point. *Cynthia* is certainly the name of the ship to which the buoy belonged. That name could suit a German vessel just as much as a British one. But it wasn't written in Gothic letters. So, the ship must be British—let's say Anglo-Saxon to be more precise.

'Everything seems to confirm this hypothesis; for it could hardly be other than a British vessel, bound for Inverness or the Orkneys, which would be carried off course by the tempest into the waters off Norö. And you mustn't forget that this scrap of living salvage could not have floated far, for it had survived hunger and the dangers of its perilous voyage! Well, all that being stated, what conclusion do you come to, my dear friends?'

Neither the professor nor the lawyer judged it well to utter a word.

'A conclusion is what you don't seem to be able to come to,' the doctor continued in tones suggestive of a secret triumph, 'Perhaps you think you can see a contradiction between these two elements—a child of Celtic race—a ship with an Anglo-Saxon name? That's simply because you're neglecting the existence on the flanks of Great Britain of a people of Celtic race, those of the sister isle—Ireland! I myself could not at first think of that, and that's what kept me from seeing quite clearly the solution of the problem. But now the solution forces itself upon us: the child is Irish! Isn't that your opinion, Hochstedt?'

But if there were anything on earth that the worthy professor disliked, it was having to give a definite opinion on any

subject whatever. And it must certainly be agreed that in the case now submitted to his impartial judgment any opinion would at least have been premature. So he contented himself with an evasive nod of his head as he replied, 'It's incontestable that the Irish belong to the Celtic branch of the Aryan race.'

This was undeniably not one of those axioms which can be accused of undue boldness.

But Dr. Schwaryencrona asked no more, and he saw in this a complete confirmation of his theory. 'You agree with it yourself!' he shouted excitedly, 'The Irish being Celts, the child having all the characteristics of the Celtic race, and the *Cynthia* being a British ship, it seems to me that we've got the clue we need to find the poor child's family. It's in Great Britain that we'll have to look for it. A few advertisements in *The Times* will probably be enough to put us on the track!'

And no doubt the doctor would have gone on to develop his scheme of investigation when he noticed that the lawyer was keeping a complete silence, and seemed to be welcoming these deductions with an ironical smile.

'If you're not of my opinion, Bredejord, better say so. You know that I never shrink from an argument!' He cut himself short.

'I never said anything!' Herr Bredejord replied. 'Hochstadt can testify that I never said anything.'

'No, but I can see quite well that you don't share my opinion! And I should be curious to know why,' the doctor insisted, assailed once more by the quarrelsome mood which the whist had aroused. 'Is *Cynthia* an English name?' he asked. 'Yes, because it wasn't written in Gothic lettering, which would have indicated a German ship. Are the Irish Celts? Certainly! You've just heard our esteemed friend Hochstadt proclaim this in front of you. Has the child all the characteristics of the Celtic Race? You have been able to judge that for yourself, it struck you before I opened my mouth on the subject. I conclude, therefore, that it would be disgraceful bad faith not to share my opinion, and to recognise, with me, that the child must belong to an Irish family!'

'Bad faith is rather strong,' Herr Bredejord protested. 'If

those words are meant for me, I haven't yet expressed the slightest opinion.'

'No, but you show clearly enough that you don't share mine!'

'Maybe that's my right!'

'Then you must give convincing reasons in support of your own theory.'

'Who told you that I've got one?'

'Then it's just systematic opposition, the need to contradict me in everything just as you do in whist!'

'Nothing is further from my mind, I assure you! You're reasoning doesn't seem convincing to me, that's all!'

'But in what respect, I ask? I should be curious to know!'

'It would take too long to tell you. There, it's striking eleven! I'll content myself with offering to bet you I'll wager your Alde Manuce Pliny against my Quintilian, *edition princeps* of Venice, that you haven't guessed right, and that this boy of yours isn't Irish!'

'You know that I don't like betting,' protested the doctor, calmed by that invincible good humour. 'But it'll give me so much pleasure to prove you wrong that I'd accept your bet.'

'Well, that's settled. How long will it take for your investigations?'

'A few months will be enough, I hope; but I told Hersebom two years to be on the safe side.'

'Well, I'll give you two years. Hochstadt will act as umpire. And no bad feeling, is there?'

'No bad feeling, of course not! But I can see your Quintilian is in great danger of joining my Pliny,' the doctor replied.

And having shaken the hands of his two friends, he showed them to the door.

CHAPTER V

TRETEN YULL DAG

NEXT DAY, Erik's new life started on its normal course. Dr. Schwaryencrona, after taking him to a tailor, who fitted him

out in city style, introduced him to one of the town's finest schools. It was among those which correspond to a French *lycée* or a British Grammar School, and which go in Sweden under the name of the *Högre elementar larovek*.

In these the scholars learn the ancient and modern languages, the elementary sciences, and all that has to be known before starting on the higher courses of the universities. As in Germany and Italy, all the pupils are day-boys, those who have no relations in town living with the professors or other responsible persons. The fees are open to modification and can even be reduced to zero whenever any child has no means at all. Well-equipped gymnasia are attached for the higher classes, so that physical education goes hand-in-hand with intellectual culture.

Erik at once reached the foremost place in his section. He learned everything very easily, so that he had plenty of time to himself. The doctor therefore decided that he could spend his evenings following a course at the *Slodjskolan*, Stockholm's great industrial school: This was especially devoted to applied science, to physical and chemical experiments and geometrical construction, to everything which can be learned only theoretically at school. Dr. Schwaryencrona thought with reason that the teaching of that school—one of the wonders of Stockholm—would give new impetus to Erik's rapid progress but he could never have dared hope for the results of this double education.

Indeed, his young *protégé* assimilated at a glance the knowledge which enabled him to reach the very depths of all the basic sciences. Instead of the vague superficial notions which fall to the lot of so many pupils, he stored in his mind a stock of accurate, precise, and definitive ideas. The further development of these principles would be only a question of time.

Thereafter he could touch, without difficulty and as though it were only play, on all the highest branches of university education. The same service which Herr Malarius had rendered him for languages, history, geography, and botany, by first making him plunge deeply into their principles, the *Slodjskolan* rendered him for the sciences, by inculcating him with the ABC of the industrial arts, without which the finest lessons can stay lifeless for so long.

Far from tiring Erik's mind, the number and variety of these exercises strengthened it far beyond what the more specialised studies could have done. The gymnasium was always there to give the body its revenge when the mind had had its turn, and here as in school, Erik was foremost. Then during the holidays he never failed to go to visit the sea which he loved with a filial tenderness, shaking hands and chatting with the sailors and fishermen, and sometimes returning home with a fine fish which always received welcome from Fru Greta.

The good woman had become really fond of the house's new inmate. Erik was so pleasant, so naturally courteous and obliging, that it seemed almost impossible to know him and not to like him. In a week he was on as good terms with Herr Bredejord and Professor Hochstedt as he was with the Doctor himself.

The only one who kept aloof from him was Kajsa. Whether that male fairy regarded him as a threat to the incontestable sovereignty she had hitherto exercised over the house, or whether she vented on Erik the resentment which she felt on account of the doctor's sarcasms, mild though they were, against her airs and graces, she kept on treating the intruder with a disdainful coldness which nothing seemed able to overcome. Fortunately, however, her opportunities for showing her disdain came but seldom, for Erik was almost always either out or locked in his room.

Two years later Christmas came for the second time since Erik's departure. In all central and northern Europe this is *the* great yearly festival, coinciding as it does with the dead season of almost all the industries. In Norway, in particular, it is extended for almost a fortnight, *tretten Yule dag*, the thirteen days of Christmas, and it is made the occasion for exceptional rejoicing: It is the time for family reunions, for feasting and even for betrothals. Food piles up in the humblest dwellings, and everywhere hospitality is the order of the day. The *Yule ol* or Christmas beer flows in torrents. Every visitor is offered a bumper in a wooden cup mounted with gold, silver or copper, which the families, even the most modest, have handed down from time immemorial, and it is essential to empty it standing, while exchanging with one's host good wishes for Christmas and the New Year.

Finally it is at Christmas that servants of all kinds are given the new clothes which often form the most definite part of their wages—the very cattle, the sheep, and even the birds of heaven have a right to a double ration or to something extra. From Norway comes the saying ‘He’s so poor he can’t even give the sparrows their Christmas dinner.’

Of all the thirteen traditional days, Christmas Eve is the gayest. Then it is the custom for the small boys and little girls to troop out into the country, travelling on their skis, stopping in front of the houses and singing their old national melodies in chorus. Their clear voices, suddenly ringing out in the clear night air amidst of the loneliness of valleys clad in their winter garments, are as charming as they are unusual. Doors are at once thrown open; the singers are invited in; they are given cakes, dried apples and ale, and are sometimes made to dance. Then, after this frugal supper, the happy band sets off, like a flock of seagulls, to start again further away. Distances are nothing on skis.

That year, at the Hersebom’s, the festival would be complete. They were waiting for Erik, his arrival for Christmas Eve having been announced by a letter from Stockholm. So neither Otto nor Vanda could keep still, and they kept running to the door to see if the traveller had arrived. Though she reprimanded them for their impatience, Fru Katrina fully shared it. Captain Hersebom alone was silent, smoking his pipe and apparently torn between the desire to see his adopted son and his fear of not being able to keep him much longer.

It might have been for the hundredth time that Otto had gone to keep watch when he suddenly returned shouting ‘Mother! Vanda! I think it’s him!’

Everybody rushed to the door. Far away, on the Bergen road, a black spot could be clearly seen.

The black spot enlarged rapidly and took the shape of a young man, clad in dark cloth, wearing a fur cap and bearing on his shoulders a patent-leather haversack. He was travelling on skis and was plainly coming towards them.

Soon there was no longer any doubt; the traveller had seen the group waiting for him in front of the house; taking off his cap, he waved it above his head.

Another two minutes and Erik had fallen into the arms of

Fru Katrina, Otto, Vanda, and Captain Hersebom, who had left his arm-chair to go as far as the threshold.

They hugged him until he was almost stifled, devoured him with kisses, and fell into raptures over his healthy appearance. Fru Katrina, above all, couldn't get over it.

What! This was that dear child whom she had held on her knee! This tall fellow so elegantly turned out with his frank decided appearance, his broad shoulders, his lip already marked with the vestige of a moustache! Could it be possible?

The good woman felt herself gripped with a sort of respect for her one-time foster-child. She was so proud of him, proud especially of the tears of happiness she could see in his brown eyes. For he too was deeply moved.

'Oh, Mother, it's really you,' he exclaimed. 'At last I'm seeing you again! How long these two years have been! I wonder if you've missed me as much as I've missed you?'

'We certainly have,' Captain Hersebom assured him. 'Not a day has passed without our talking about you. In the evening, when we're all together, or in the morning when we're having our meals, it's your name which keeps coming to our lips. But you, my boy, you never forgot us in the big city? You're glad to come back to your own country and your old home?'

'I don't think you can doubt that!' Erik again started distributing kisses all round. 'You've always been in my thoughts! But it was especially when the wind rose to a gale, father, that I thought most of you. I said to myself "Where is he? Has he got home safely? Has he made sure of getting into harbour?"'

'Every night I looked for the meteorological reports in the doctor's paper, to know if the weather were the same on this coast as it was in Sweden. And I found that you have them much oftener than we do in Stockholm, these gales which come from America and roar against our mountains. Oh, how that made me wish I could be with you in the boat, helping you handle the sail, master the difficulties you had to face! But when the weather was good I felt I was imprisoned in this great town, shut in between its three-storey houses! Yes, I'd have given the world to be back at sea for only an hour and to feel free and happy in the wind just as I was in the old days!'

A smile lightened the fisherman's sunburnt face. 'So the books haven't spoiled you!' his tone showed his deep satisfaction. 'A Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year, my boy!' he added. 'Now let's go and have a meal! All that the dinner's been waiting for is you!'

Once seated in his old place, on the right of the good Katrina, Erik could at last look around him and realise the changes which two years had brought to the family. Otto was now a great sturdy youth of sixteen, but he looked twenty. As for Vanda, the two years had transformed her appearance. Her charming face had gained a more refined expression. Her splendid ash-blond hair, falling in heavy plaits upon her shoulders, formed a light silver cloud around her forehead. As modest and gentle as of yore, she took care, without making this too evident, that nobody at the table wanted for anything.

'Vanda's a big girl now,' her mother said proudly, 'If only you knew, Erik, how clever she is, how she's worked to educate herself since you went away! Now she's at the top of the school. Herr Malarius tells me that she's his only consolation for not having you in his class.'

'Dear old Herr Malarius, I'll be so pleased to see him, too!' Erik replied. 'And so our Vanda's become as clever as that?' he asked with interest, while the girl blushed to the roots of her hair at her mother's praise.

'And she's learning to play the organ,' Fru Katrina added, 'and Herr Malarius says she's got the prettiest voice in the whole choir.'

'Well, it's certainly an accomplished young lady whom I've found!' Erik laughed to spare his sister any embarrassment. 'Tomorrow she must show us her talents.'

Then, without the slightest affectation, he began chatting about the people of Noroë, asking what news there was of each, enquiring about his comrades, about what had happened since he went away, about the incidents of the fishing, about all the everyday details of local life. Then it was his turn to satisfy his family's curiosity by describing his life at Stockholm and talking about Fru Greta, Kajsa, and the doctor.

'That reminds me, father, that I've got a letter for you,' he said, taking it out of the inside pocket of his waistcoat. 'I

don't know what's in it, but the doctor told me to be careful of it, because there's something in it about me.'

Captain Hersebom took the large sealed envelope and laid it before him on the table.

'Well,' Erik demanded, 'aren't you going to read it to us?'

'No,' was the fisherman's laconic reply.

'But as it's about me?' the boy insisted.

'But it's addressed to me,' Captain Hersebom replied, holding the letter in front of him. 'Yes. So I'll read it at the proper time.'

Filial obedience is at the base of Norwegian family life, and Erik bent his head. Then they got up, and the three young people, sitting on their bench beside the hearth as they had done so often before, embarked upon one of those intimate chats, in which everybody relates everything he is asked, and say, once again what he has already said a hundred times before.

But Katrina came and went about the room, clearing up and insisting that Vanda should 'play the lady,' as she put it, meaning that for once she shouldn't have to do any of the household tasks.

Captain Hersebom had gone back to his great armchair and was quietly smoking his pipe. It was only after successfully carrying out this delicate operation that he decided to open the doctor's letter.

He read it without saying anything, then he folded it up again, put it in his pocket, and filled a second pipe, which he smoked, like its predecessor, in silence. All the evening he was absorbed in his thoughts.

Although he was never one for talking, this silence was bound to seem strange. Fru Katrina, who had at last finished her work and come to sit down with the others beside the fire, made one or two attempts to get a word out of him. But finding her efforts rebuffed, she soon fell into a deep melancholy. At last the children after having chatted until they had run out of breath, began to be affected by their parents' obvious sadness.

A score or so of fresh voices, breaking out suddenly at the door, produced a very timely diversion. A joyous party of

schoolboys and schoolgirls had had the good idea of giving a cordial welcome to Erik.

Everybody hurried to ask them in and to offer them the traditional snack as they thronged round their former comrade, telling him how very glad they were to see him once more. Erik, deeply moved at this unexpected visit from the friends of his childhood, insisted on going along with them when they recommenced their Christmas serenade, and Otto and Vanda naturally joined the party. Fru Katrina advised them not to go too far, and to bring their brother back soon, for he certainly needed rest.

Scarcely had the door closed behind them when the good woman turned towards her husband, 'Well, has the doctor told you anything?' she asked anxiously.

Captain Herseboom's only reply was to take the letter out of his pocket, to open it, and to start reading it out loud, not without hesitating every now and again at certain words which were new to him.

'My dear Herseboom,' the doctor had written. 'It's two years since you entrusted your child to me, and every day I've found a new pleasure in watching his progress. His intelligence is as quick and alert as his heart is generous. Erik is certainly one of nature's aristocrats, and the parents who lost such a child, if they realised the full extent of their loss, would certainly have every reason to deplore it.

'Yet it is more than doubtful whether his parents are still alive. As we agreed, I have neglected nothing which might have put us on their track. I have written to several addresses in England, employed a special agency to carry out investigations, inserted advertisements in a score of papers, English, Irish, and Scottish. Not the faintest gleam of light has shone on the mystery, and I might even say that all the information we've so far received tends rather to obscure it.

'The name *Cynthia* is indeed, very common in the British mercantile marine. Lloyd's have notified me of seventeen ships of every tonnage that bear it, some hailing from English ports, others from those of Scotland or Ireland. My hypothesis regarding the child's nationality has been confirmed abundantly, and I feel more and more clearly that Erik belongs to some Irish family. I don't know whether I told you how I reached

that conclusion, but I have mentioned it, since I got back to Stockholm, to two of my most intimate friends. I repeat that everything tends to corroborate it.

‘Whether that Irish family has completely disappeared or whether it has some interest in not making itself known, it has not given the faintest sign of life.

‘Another strange circumstance, and to my mind more suspicious still, no shipwreck registered by Lloyd’s or by that marine insurance companies appears to have been recorded on the date when the child arrived off our coasts. Two of the *Cynthia’s*, admittedly, have perished this century, but one was in the Indian Ocean, thirty-two years ago, and the other within sight of Portsmouth, eighteen years ago.

‘We are forced to the conclusion that the child was not the victim of a shipwreck. He must undoubtedly have been exposed to the waves! That explains why none of my advertisements produced any result.

‘However this may be, after having successively asked all the marine companies and private individuals owning a ship that bears the name of the *Cynthia*, after having exhausted every means of investigation, I am forced to the conclusion that there is no longer any possibility of finding Erik’s family.

‘The question thus confronts us, and especially yourself, my dear Hersebom, is to know what we ought to tell the child and what we ought to do about him.

‘If I were in your place, I tell you in all sincerity, I should now put him in possession of all the facts that concern him and leave him free to make up his mind for himself. You will remember that we agreed to adopt this line of conduct if my researches should prove fruitless. The moment is come to decide. I leave you the task of explaining this to Erik. In returning to Norway, he is still completely unaware that he is not your own son, and he does not know whether to return to Stockholm or to stay with you. It is for you to speak.

‘Remember that if you shrink from this, Erik may one day have the right to ask why you did so. Remember above all that he is a child with too outstanding an intelligence to be condemned to an obscure illiberal life. Such a sentence would have been undeserved two years ago; now that he had gained

the most brilliant success at Stockholm, it would be absolutely unjustifiable.

'So I renew my previous offers. I will enable him to complete his studies and to gain at Upsala the title of Doctor of Medicine; he shall continue to be brought up as my son, and will only have to follow the high road to achieve fame and fortune and renown.

'I know that in addressing myself to you and to Erik's adopted mother I leave his fate in good hands. No personal consideration will keep you, I feel sure, from accepting my proposition. Consult Malarius in all these matters. In waiting for your reply, Herr Hersebom, I send you an affectionate handshake, and I beg you to remember me most kindly to your good lady and your children.

'R. W. SCHWARYENCRONA, M.D.'

When Hersebom had finished reading his wife, who had been in tears as she listened to him, asked him what he meant to do.

'That's quite clear,' he replied. 'Speak to the boy.'

'That's my opinion, too, and we shan't have any rest until we've settled it,' she murmured as she wiped her eyes.

Then they both fell into silence.

It was past midnight when the three children returned from their expedition. Their complexions freshened by their race in the open air, their eyes gleaming with happiness, they went back to their places beside the fire, and settled down to end their Christmas Eve cheerfully, by gobbling down a last cake before the immense log which was embedded in its cavern of flames.

CHAPTER VI

ERIK'S DECISION

NEXT MORNING the fisherman sent for Erik and addressed him in the presence of Katrina, Vanda, and Otto.

'Erik, Dr. Schwaryencrona's letter was about you. It testifies

that you have given every satisfaction to your teachers, and that the doctor proposes to bear all the expenses of your further education, if you decide to pursue this. But the letter insists that you decide for yourself, as soon as you know all the facts, whether you will change your mode of life once and for all or whether you will stay with us in Noroë, as we should much prefer, you may be sure of that! And now I must let you into a great secret—a secret which my wife and I would have preferred to keep to ourselves.'

At this point Fru Katrina, unable to keep back her tears, burst into sobs, and grasped Erik's hand. She pressed it against her heart, as though to protest against what the young man was about to hear.

'This secret,' Hersebon continued in a voice more and more touched by emotion, 'is that you are only our child by adoption. I found you in the sea, my boy, and rescued you when you were barely eight or nine months old. God is my witness that I never dreamed of telling you, and that your mother and I have never made the slightest difference between you and Otto or Vanda. But Dr. Schwaryencrona insists upon it! And now see what he has written to me.'

Erik had turned as pale as death. Otto and Vanda, overwhelmed by what they had just heard, gave a cry of astonishment. And at once they followed their mother's example. Passing an arm round Erik's neck, they huddled up against him, one on his right, the other on his left. Then Erik took the doctor's letter, and, without trying to hide the emotion it cost him, he read it from end to end.

Captain Hersebon then related in full detail everything he had previously told the doctor. He explained how the latter had decided him to discover Erik's family, and what had come of this, and how he himself had never been so ill-advised as he had been in failing to try to solve this insoluble problem. Then Fru Katrina rose, went over to the oak chest; she took out the garments which the baby had worn, and displayed the teething-ring which he had borne at his neck. As was only natural, the three children found in this story a dramatic interest that quite destroyed any suggestion of bitterness. They gazed in wonder at the lace and the velvet, the gold of the teething-ring and its motto—much as though they were

present at a real-life fairy story. The very impossibility, which the doctor had explained, of getting any practical result from these clues seemed to render them almost sacred.

Erik looked on as though in a dream, and his thoughts flew towards that unknown mother, she who no doubt had dressed him in these garments, who more than once had made her child smile by shaking this very teething-ring before his eyes. As he touched these objects, he seemed to find himself in direct communion with her, right across time and space. Yet where could she be, that mother? Was she still alive, or had she perished? Was she still weeping for her child, or must that child regard her as forever lost?

He had been absorbed in these thoughts for some minutes, his head bent low upon his chest, when a word of Fru Katrina's made him lift it. 'Erik, you're still our child!' she exclaimed, uneasy at his silence.

The young fellow's eyes, as he glanced round, recognised all these well-loved figures, the maternal gaze of that good woman, the loyal face of Captain Hersehom, that of Otto more affectionate now than usual; that of Vanda, serious and distressed. As he read the tenderness and anxiety of all these countenances, Erik felt, as they say, that his heart was breaking.

He suddenly realised the innermost meaning of the situation. He seemed to behold the whole episode which his father had just described—the cradle abandoned to the mercy of the waves, rescued by a rough fisherman and carried home in all simplicity to his wife. These people, humble and poor though they were, never hesitating to keep this little stranger, to adopt him, to cherish him like their own son—never saying a word to him for fourteen years and now hanging on his lips as if they were expecting a verdict of life or death.

All this moved him so strongly that suddenly his tears began to flow. An irresistible feeling of love and gratitude gripped his whole being. He felt a sort of thirst to devote himself to returning to these good people a little of that blind tenderness which they had shown him; he would refuse to leave them, he would remain content with his lowly status, forever belonging to them and to Noroö.

'Mother,' he said, throwing himself into Katrina's arms,

'do you think I could hesitate now that I know everything? We'll write to the doctor to thank him for his goodness and tell him that I'm staying here! I'll be a fisherman like you, Father, and like you, Otto! As you've given me a place at your hearth, I want to keep it! As you've nourished me with the work of your hands, I want to return to your declining years what you gave so generously to my childhood!'

'God be praised!' Katrina exclaimed, pressing Erik close again against her in a transport of tenderness and joy.

'I knew, myself, that the boy would prefer the sea to all the books in the world!' was all that Captain Hersebom said; he did not realise the sacrifice which Erik's decision had cost him. 'Well. That's something settled! Let's say no more about that, and let's think of nothing except keeping the good Christmas holidays.'

They exchanged kisses, their eyes damp with happiness, and vowed never to part.

When Erik was alone, if he was unsuccessful in stifling a sigh when he thought of all his dreams of work and success which he now had to renounce, at least that sacrifice gave him an austere happiness which he was almost able to enjoy.

'As it's the wish of my adopted parents,' he reflected, 'what does anything else matter? I'll have to resign myself and to work for them in the sphere where fate and their devotion has placed me! If I've sometimes been ambitious for a better fortune, wasn't it only so that they could share it? As they're happy here and don't wish for a happier lot, I must be content to satisfy them with my work and behaviour. So farewell to books and hurrah for the sea!'

This he pondered, and soon his thoughts returned to what he had just learned. He wondered whence he had come when Hersebom had found him floating on the crest of the waves; what was his country, who were his parents?

Were they still alive? In some distant country had he any brothers or sisters whom he would never know?

At Stockholm, too, at the Doctor's, Christmas had been the occasion of an unusual evening. It was that date, it will be remembered, that had been chosen to settle the wager laid by Herr Bredejord against his eminent friend, and of which Professor Hochstedt was to be the judge.

For two years nothing had been said by either on this subject. The doctor was patiently carrying on his investigations in England, and multiplying his advertisements in the papers, but taking care not to admit that his efforts had been unavailing. As for Herr Bredejord, he avoided, with a reserve in the best possible taste, bringing the conversation round to the subject; he simply contented himself, when he got a chance, with making an allusion to the beauty of the copy of Pliny, come from the presses of Aldus Manucius, which shone in the doctor's library.

And simply from the slyness with which he then tapped the tips of his fingers on his tobacco-pouch it was clear what he was thinking.

'There's a Pliny which won't go too badly between my Quintilian, *edition princeps* of Venice, and my Horace with its wide margins on China paper, from the Elzevir brothers!'

It was in this way, anyhow, that the doctor generally interpreted this pantomime, which had a special trick of getting on his nerves. It was on those evenings that he showed himself especially pitiless at whist, and that he never overlooked any of his partner's mistakes.

But time none the less passed on its course, and the hour had at last struck when the question had to be submitted to the impartial arbitration of Professor Hochstedt.

Dr. Schwaryencrona submitted it with the greatest frankness. Scarcely had Kajsa left him alone with his two friends than he admitted, as he had done in his letter to Captain Hersebom, the negative result of his investigations. Nothing had come to throw light on the mystery which enveloped Erik's origin, and the doctor had to conclude, in all sincerity, that to him the mystery seemed insoluble.

'All the same,' he continued, 'I shouldn't be doing justice to myself if I didn't declare with no less sincerity, that I don't think I've done anything towards losing my wager. I haven't found Erik's family, granted, but the information which I've collected is of a nature rather to corroborate my conclusions than to invalidate it. The *Cynthia* is, or was, so clearly a British ship that there have been no less than seventeen bearing that name on Lloyd's registers.'

'As to the ethnographical characters, they are even more

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clearly Celtic than ever. My hypothesis as to Erik's nationality thus, I might say, comes victoriously out of the enquiry. More than ever I'm convinced that he's an Irishman, as I suspected. But I'm certainly not obliged to make the family show itself, if it has any reason for not doing so, or even if it has vanished. Now, my dear Hochstedt, that is what I have to say. It is for you to tell us whether you don't think that the Quintilian of my friend Bredejord ought legitimately to be transferred to my library?'

At these words, which seemed to give him an irresistible desire to laugh, the lawyer threw himself back in his arm-chair and feebly waggled his hand as though in protest. Then he fixed his little gleaming eyes on Professor Hochstadt to see how he would get out of it.

Professor Hochstadt did not seem to be as embarrassed as might have been expected. He would certainly have been if some invincible argument produced by the doctor had put him into the painful necessity of pronouncing in favour of one party or the other. His prudent irresolute character led him to prefer indecision in everything. In such cases he excelled in displaying one after the other both sides of the question, and he swam in vagueness like a fish in water. So he found himself, this evening, in command of circumstances.

'It is incontestable,' he pronounced, with a nod of the head, 'that there is, in the fact that seventeen English ships bear the name of *Cynthia*, a most serious indication in favour of the conclusion expressed by our eminent friend. This indication, supported as it is by the ethnographical characters of the subject, is certainly of great weight, and I do not hesitate to say that it seems almost decisive to me. I do not find it difficult to say that if I had to express a personal opinion as to Erik's nationality, that opinion would be as follows: the probabilities are in favour of an Irish nationality!'

'But probability is one thing and certainty is another, and if I dare say so it is a certainty that we must have to settle the question. The chances may certainly be great in favour of Schwaryencrona's opinion. Bredejord can always declare that no absolute proof has been given. So I do not see any adequate reason for declaring that the doctor has won his Quintilian, nor do I see any reason to say that his Pliny is lost. To my

mind the question is still unsettled, the wager ought to be annulled, and that's certainly the best thing that could happen in such circumstances!'

Like all decisions which leave the parties just where they were, that of Professor Hochstadt did not seem to have satisfied the one more than the other. The doctor thrust forward his lower lip in a way which showed this quite clearly. As for Herr Bredejord, he jumped to his feet shouting:

'Very well, my dear Hochstadt, so you're in no hurry to come to a conclusion! Schwaryencrona, you say, hasn't been able to demonstrate a fact which you think probable, so you won't say that he's won? What would you say, then, if I were to prove to you, here and now, that the *Cynthia* wasn't an English ship at all?'

'What would I say?' the professor seemed somewhat troubled by this unexpected attack. 'My word, I shouldn't know about that! I should look into it, I should examine the question from all sides.'

'Then look at this at your leisure!' the lawyer replied, thrusting his hand into an inside pocket of his riding-coat to take out a pocket-book. From this he chose a letter in one of those canary-yellow envelopes which at once indicate an American origin. 'Here's a document you can't take exception to,' he added, placing that letter—it was addressed to himself—under the eyes of the doctor, who read it aloud:

"New York, 27th October.

'Sir,

In reply to your esteemed favour of 5th instant, I hasten to communicate the following facts to you:

- '1. A vessel named the *Cynthia*, Captain Barton, owned by the Canadian General Transport Company, was lost with her cargo and crew fourteen years ago, in the latitude of the Faroe Islands.
- '2. This ship was insured with the General Steam Navigation Company of New York for the sum of three million eight hundred thousand dollars.
- '3. The disappearance of the *Cynthia* remains completely unexplained, and the cause of the disaster not having

appeared sufficiently clear to the insurers, an action was brought, and this action was lost by the owners of the said vessel.

- ‘4. The loss of this action brought about the dissolution of the Canadian Transport Company, which ceased to exist eleven years ago as a result of its liquidation.

“In the hope of further instructions, I ask you to accept Sir, our cordial greetings.

‘Jeremy Smith, Walker and Co.
Marine Agents.’

‘Well, what do you say to that?’ asked Herr Bredejord, when the doctor had finished reading. Here’s a document which has a certain significance, you will agree?’

‘I quite agree,’ the doctor replied. ‘How the devil did you get hold of it?’

‘The simplest way in the world. The day you spoke of the *Cynthia* as being necessarily an English vessel, I at once realised that you were needlessly restricting the field of your enquiries, and that the vessel might just as well be American. Realising that time was passing and you were getting nowhere, for otherwise you’d have told us, I had the idea of writing to New York. At my third letter I got the result you see! It isn’t complicated now! Don’t you think it’s enough to assure me the incontestable ownership of your Pliny?’

‘That conclusion doesn’t seem to be proved!’ the doctor replied. He was re-reading the letter in silence as if to look for new arguments in support of his thesis.

‘Doesn’t seem proved!’ the lawyer exclaimed. ‘I’ve proved that the vessel was American and that she perished in the latitude of the Faroë Islands, that is to say quite close to the Norwegian coast, just at the time which correspond’s to the child’s arrival, and you’re not yet convinced you’ve made a mistake?’

‘Not the least bit in the world! But please note, my dear colleague, that I don’t at all contest the great value of your document. You have proved what I was unable to discover, that the real *Cynthia* was lost a short distance from our coasts at the proper time. But allow me to point out that this find exactly confirms my theory. For now the vessel is Canadian

—that is to say British—and the Irish element is quite large in Canada. So now I've got a new reason for thinking that the child is of Irish origin?'

'Oh, so that's what you find in my letter,' exclaimed Herr Bredejord, more annoyed than he wanted to appear. 'And no doubt you will persist in believing that you haven't lost your Pliny?'

'Certainly.'

'And perhaps you even think you've got some right to my Quintilian?'

'At any rate I hope to succeed in establishing those rights, thanks to your own discovery, if you'll only be good enough to grant me time and renew our wager!'

'Right! I quite agree! How much time do you need?'

'Take another two years, and let's adjourn it until the next Christmas but one!'

'Agreed!' Herr Bredejord replied. 'But I assure you, my dear sir, that you would do better to send me my Pliny out of hand.'

'My word, no! It will look better in my own library by the side of my Quintilian!'

CHAPTER VII

VANDA GIVES HER OPINION

AT FIRST Erik, still gripped by the zeal of self-sacrifice, threw himself headlong into the life of a fisherman, trying in all good faith to forget what he had learned elsewhere. Always the first up, he was also the first to start work on his foster-father's boat, to get everything ready so that Captain Hersebom had only to grasp the tiller and set sail. When the wind failed, Erik taking the heavy oars, rowed vigorously, apparently seeking out the humblest and most tiring work.

Nothing repelled him, neither the long spells when the cod-fisher waits for the fish to be caught, nor the detailed preparations which the catch has to undergo; first its tongue, which is

one of its most delicate morsels, is removed, then its head, and then its bones, before it is thrown into the tank where it gets its first salting. Whatever his work might be, Erik carried it out not merely conscientiously but with a sort of passion. He amazed the placid Otto by his devotion to the smallest details of his craft. 'How you must have suffered in the town,' the good fellow commented naïvely. 'You never seem to find yourself in your element until you're out of the fiord and in the open sea!'

When the conversation took this turn, Erik almost always stayed silent. Sometimes, on the contrary, he would raise the subject himself, striving to prove to Otto, or rather to himself, that no existence was better than theirs.

'That's just what I think!' the other would reply with his calm smile.

And poor Erik turned away to stifle a sigh.

The truth is that he was suffering cruelly at having to relinquish his studies, at seeing himself condemned to a life of purely physical toil. When such thoughts beset him, he braced himself to drive them away and, so to speak, struggled bodily with them. Yet whatever he did he felt himself invaded by a bitter regret. For nothing in the world would he have let anyone guess his state of mind; he shut it up within himself, which made him suffer the more acutely. A disaster which took place at the beginning of spring made his distress even more poignant.

That day they had plenty of work at the hangar stacking up the salted cod. Captain Hersebom, having entrusted this lash to Erik and Otto, had gone out fishing alone. It was dull and tiring weather, quite out of keeping with the season, and as they forced themselves to work vigorously, they could not help noticing how especially tiring it seemed. Everything around them, including the very air, seemed to be bearing down upon them more heavily than usual.

'It's queer,' Erik commented, 'I've got a buzzing in my ears as though I were in a balloon several thousand yards up!'

And just at that moment his nose began to bleed. Otto was feeling the same symptoms, although he could not have defined them so exactly.

'I should think the barometer must be down very low!'

Erik continued. 'If I'd got time to slip across to Herr Malarius, I'd go and look at it.'

'You've got plenty of time,' Otto replied. 'Look here, our job's nearly finished and even if he keeps you I can easily finish it myself.'

'Then I'll be off,' Erik decided. 'I don't know why the state of the air makes me so uneasy. I would like to see father come back!'

As he was hurrying towards the school, he met Herr Malarius.

'Oh there you are, Erik!' the teacher exclaimed. 'I'm so glad to see you and to know you're not at sea! I'd just come to ask about you! The barometer has fallen so quickly during the last half-hour. I've never seen such a thing! It's gone down to twenty-eight inches! There's certainly going to be a change in the weather.'

Hardly had he finished speaking when a distant rumbling, followed by a sort of dismal whine, rent the air. To the west the sky was almost instantaneously covered with a veil as black as ink, then the rest of it darkened with amazing speed. Then suddenly, after an interval of complete silence, the leaves of the trees, the wisps of straw, the sand, and the pebbles, were swept over the ground by a squall. The tempest had arrived.

It was of unheard-of violence. The chimneys, the window-shutters, in some places the very roofs, were swept away like feathers. Whole houses collapsed, and every shed, without exception, was ripped loose and destroyed by the wind. In the fiord, usually as calm as a mill-pond even when the storms out in the open sea were at their height, gigantic waves rose and broke upon the coast with an amazing uproar.

The cyclone raged for an whole hour, after which, checked by the mountains of Norway, it swerved southwards and swept across Continental Europe. It is recorded in the annals of meteorology as one of the most extraordinary and most disastrous which had ever crossed the Atlantic. Today these great disturbances of the air are usually announced and preceded by the telegraph, giving most of the European ports time to pass the message on to their ships which are about to set sail or are imperfectly sheltered in the harbours, so that the disasters are somewhat mitigated. But on the less frequented

coasts, in the fishing villages and on the sea, the number of shipwrecks cannot be estimated. The Veritas bureau in France, like Lloyd's, records them at not less than seven hundred and thirty.

On that day of sorrow, the first thoughts of the Hersebom family, like those of thousands of other families, were naturally for him who was at sea. Captain Hersebom usually went to the western side of a fairly large island, about two miles beyond the entrance to the fiord—the very one off whose coast he had rescued the little Erik. They could only hope that the storm had given him time to run for safety, even if it were only by beaching his skiff on its low-lying sandy shore. But anxiety kept Erik and Otto from waiting until evening to see if their hopes were well-founded.

Scarcely had the fiord regained its usual calm after the hurricane had passed than they persuaded one of their neighbours to lend him his boat so that they could go to seek tidings. Herr Malarius insisted on going with them, so the three set off together, followed by the anxious glances of Fru Katrina and her daughter.

On the fiord the wind had dropped, but it was still blowing from the west, and to reach its narrow entrance they had to make use of the oars. This took over an hour.

When they reached it they were confronted with an unexpected obstacle. Across the ocean the tempest was still raging and in breaking on the islet which blocks the entrance to Noroë fiord it split into two currents; to leeward of the isle, these united with such force that they rushed into the entrance as though into a funnel. Nobody could dream of facing it in such conditions; even a steamship could have done so only with the greatest of difficulty, and still less could a small skiff rowing against a head-wind.

They had to put back to Noroë and wait. Captain Hersebom's usual hour for returning came without bringing him, but neither did it bring any of the other fishermen who had put out that day, so there was reason to hope that it was some general obstacle and not a personal disaster which was keeping them out of the fiord. The evening was none the less very sad at every hearth where someone was missing. And the more the night wore on without the absentees reappearing, the greater

grew the anxiety. At the Hersebom's nobody went to bed; they spent the long hours of waiting seated in front of the fire, silent and broken-hearted.

In these high latitudes, even during March, dawn comes very late. But at least it was clear and brilliant. The land-wind was blowing seawards; they could hope to get out to the open sea through the entrance to the fiord. A veritable flotilla manned by everybody available in Noroë was getting ready to go out in search, when several boats were seen coming through the entrance and making for the village.

They were those which had set out on the previous day, before the cyclone. And all were there—except that of Captain Hersebom.

Nobody could give any information about him. The very fact that he had not returned with the others was in itself disquieting, for they had all encountered the greatest dangers. Some had been surprised by the storm and thrown on to the shore, where their boats had been wrecked. Others had been able to seek refuge in a sheltered inlet. A few had been stranded at the critical moment.

It was decided that the flotilla should go in search of the missing man, and Herr Malarius again volunteered to take part in the expedition, along with Erik and Otto. A great yellow animal, which showed every sign of agitation, likewise obtained permission to go with them. It was Klaas, the Greenland dog which Captain Hersebom had brought back from a voyage to Cape Farewell.

Outside the opening the boats scattered, some to the right, the others to the left, to explore the coasts of the countless islands strewn in the neighbourhood of the Noroë fiord as off all the Norwegian coasts.

When they re-assembled at noon to the south of the entrance, as had been arranged, no trace of Captain Hersebom had been found. As the investigations seemed to have been thoroughly carried out, everybody agreed, with distress, that there was nothing to do but to go back.

But Erik was unwilling to admit himself beaten or to abandon hope so easily. He declared that, having investigated the isles to the south, he now wanted to explore those on the north. Herr Malarius and Otto agreed, and they were allowed

to have their way. They were entrusted with a yawl that was easy to handle, so that they could make one last cruise; then the others bade them farewell.

Their insistence had its reward. Towards two, as they were coasting an islet just off the mainland, Klaas suddenly began to bark furiously. Then, before anyone could stop him, he threw himself into the water and swam towards the reefs.

Erik and Otto rowed feverishly in the same direction, and soon they saw the dog landing on the island. He was barking and leaping about round what looked like a human form stretched out on a grey rock.

They too made for the shore

It was indeed a man who was lying there, and that man was Herseboom! Herseboom, covered with blood, pale, motionless and cold, unconscious—perhaps dead! Klaas was licking his hands and whining pitifully.

Erik's first action was to throw himself down on his knees beside the cold body and to put his ear on its heart.

'He's alive! I can feel his heart beating!' he exclaimed.

Herr Malarius, who had gripped one of Captain Herseboom's wrists and tried to find the pulse, shook his head sadly; but none the less he made all the efforts prescribed in such circumstances. Unrolling a large woollen bodybelt which he wore round his waist, he tore it into three fragments and gave one to each of the boys. Then they began a vigorous rubbing of the victim's legs, arms, and chest.

It was soon clear that this simple treatment was having its effect and restoring the circulation. The beating of the heart grew less weak, the chest rose and fell, a feeble breath came from the lips. At last Captain Herseboom regained enough consciousness to give a faint groan.

Lifting him from the ground, his rescuers made haste to carry him away. When they had laid him down in the bottom of the boat, on a bed made of some of the sails, he opened his eyes.

'Water!' he pleaded faintly.

Erik held a bottle of *brandwin* to his lips. Having swallowed a mouthful, the victim, to judge by his look of affectionate recognition, seemed to realise what had happened. But almost

at once weariness got the better of him, and he fell back into a sleep resembling a complete lethargy.

Quite rightly thinking that they could not do better than to get back as quickly as possible, his rescuers bent to the oars and made for the entrance to the fiord. They soon reached it; then, favoured by the breeze, they were soon back at Noroë.

Captain Hersebom, carried to his bed and covered with arnica dressing, and refreshed with a cup of soup and a glass of beer, soon regained consciousness. He had suffered nothing worse than a fracture of the fore-arm and cuts and bruises all over his body. But Herr Malarius insisted, none the less, that he was not to weary himself by speaking, and the patient slept quite peacefully.

Only on the following day was he allowed to open his mouth and explain briefly what had happened.

Surprised by the cyclone just as he was hoisting his sail to return to Noroë, Hersebom had been thrown against the reefs of the islet; his boat was smashed into a thousand pieces, which were swept away by the gale. He himself had escaped from that frightful shock only through having been hurled into the sea a moment earlier. But it was only by a hair's breadth that he had escaped being crushed on the rocks, and it was only with the greatest difficulty that he was able to drag himself out of reach of the waves. Exhausted, an arm broken and his body covered with bruises, he had stayed there too weak to move, and he did not know how he had spent those twenty hours, a touch of fever no doubt having accompanied his faintness.

Now, he realised, he was well out of it, but he had still to lament that his boat was lost and his arm immobilised between two splints. What would become of him, even assuming that after a couple of months' rest he would regain the use of his arm? The boat was his family's only capital, and that capital had just disappeared in a gust of wind! At his age to work for others would be very hard. And would he even be able to find work? This was at least doubtful, for nobody at Noroë took on extra hands, and the factory itself had recently been reducing its personnel.

Such were the bitter reflexions of Captain Hersebom as he lay on his bed of pain, and especially when, at last back on his

feet, he was able to sit in his big armchair with his arm in a sling.

While waiting for his cure to be complete, the family subsisted on its last resources and on the sale of salted cod which it still had in store. But the future was black, and nobody could see how it could be lightened.

Their imminent distress gave a new direction to Erik's thoughts. For two or three days the joy of having saved Captain Hersebom's life—for it was certainly his passionate devotion which had earned him that honour—was enough to occupy his mind. How could he help being proud of it when he saw the eyes of Fru Hersebom or of Vanda resting upon him, and moist with gratitude, as though to say:

'Erik dear, Father rescued you from the deep; but now it was your turn to snatch him from death's door.'

It was certainly the highest recompense he could desire for the self-sacrifice which he had displayed when he had condemned himself to the life of a fisherman. To be able to tell himself that he had to a certain extent returned to his adopted family all its benefits at once, what thought could be sweeter or more reassuring?

But this family, which had so generously shared with him the fruits of its labour, was now on the eve of finding itself lacking bread. Did he have to keep on being a burden upon them? Was it not rather his duty to try everything he could to be able to help them?

Erik was only too clearly aware of this obligation. It was only about the method that he was doubtful, sometimes thinking about going to Bergen to ship as a seaman, sometimes dreaming of some other way at making himself useful. One day he opened his mind to Herr Malarius, who listened to his arguments and approved of them, although he protested against the idea of his setting off as a seaman.

'I could understand, even though I deplored it, he replied 'that you were resigned to staying here to share the life of your adopted parents. But I can't understand how you are going to condemn yourself to going far away to enter a calling without any future when Doctor Schvaryencrona can offer you a career in a liberal profession! Think well, my dear boy, before you come to such a decision.'

But what Herr Malarius did not tell him was that he had already written to Stockholm to put the doctor in touch with the situation, to tell him what the cyclone had done for Erik's family. So he was not surprised when three days later he received a letter which he hastened to communicate to Hersebom.

‘Stockholm, March 17th

My dear Malarius,

I thank you very heartily for having let me know the disastrous consequences which the hurricane of the 3rd instant had for the worthy Captain Hersebom. I am happy and proud to learn how Erik behaved in these circumstances, like a brave boy and a devoted son. You will find enclosed bank-notes for five hundred kroner which I ask you to give him from myself. Tell him that if this isn't enough to buy the best fishing-boat he can get at Bergen, he must let me know without delay. He will call that boat the *Cynthia*, and he will offer it to Captain Hersebom as a filial token.

‘When that is done, if Erik puts any faith in me, he will return to Stockholm and recommence his studies. There will always be a place for him at my hearth; and if he sees no reason for deciding to return, I add that I now have tidings for him and the hope of solving the mystery of his birth.

‘Believe me, my dear Malarius, always your sincere and devoted friend.

‘R. W. SCHWARYENCRONA, M.D.’

It may well be supposed how joyfully this letter was welcomed. The doctor showed, when he gave his present to Erik how well he understood the old fisherman's character. Offered direct, it was hardly probable that Captain Hersebom would have accepted the boat. But how could he refuse it from his adopted child, especially when it bore the name of *Cynthia*, which would recall how Erik had come into his family!

The reverse of the medal, the thought which darkened every brow, was the prospect of seeing Erik going away again. Nobody dared mention it, although everybody thought of it. Erik himself, his head bent low on his chest, was torn between the very natural desire to satisfy the doctor by realising the

secret wish of his own heart, and the no less natural desire not to offend his adopted parents.

It was Vanda who took it upon herself to melt the ice.

'Erik,' she told him in her grave gentle voice, 'you can't say no to the doctor's letter! You cannot, for it would mean your not only showing yourself ungrateful but sinning against yourself. Your place is among the savants, not among the fishermen! I've been thinking that for a long time! As nobody else dares tell you, I'm telling you myself!'

'Vanda is right!' Herr Malarius exclaimed with a smile.

'Vanda is right,' repeated Fru Katrina, as she wiped away a tear.

It was thus that, for the second time, it was decided that Erik should leave.

CHAPTER VIII

PATRICK O'DONOGHAN

THOUGH WHAT Dr. Schwaryencrona had just discovered was not of first importance, it was enough to set him on the trail, he had found out the name of the ex-director of the Canadian Transport Company, Joshua Churchill.

Admittedly nobody knew what had become of this person since the Company had been liquidated, but the quest naturally began in that direction. Let them only find Joshua Churchill, and then perhaps they could get some information from him regarding the old registers of the Company—and perhaps the passenger list of the *Cynthia*. There the baby might have been mentioned with his family or his guardians. That was the advice given by the solicitor who had formerly dealt with those registers, but who had lost sight of Joshua Churchill for ten years.

Dr. Schwaryencrona had a moment's illusory hope, when he found that the American papers usually published the list of passengers setting sail for Europe. Then all he would have to do might be to consult a collection of old gazettes to find that referring to the *Cynthia*.

He soon learned, however, that his hypothesis was ill-founded—the custom of publishing passenger lists was quite recent—only went a few years back. The papers none the less had their value, in giving the exact date on which the *Cynthia* had sailed; on November 3rd she had left, not a Canadian port as they had imagined, but New York bound for Hamburg.

It was therefore first in Hamburg, and then in New York, that they must seek further information.

In Hamburg they got next to nothing. The consignees of the Canadian firm knew nothing about the *Cynthia's* passengers, and all they could do was to tell him the nature of her cargo—which they knew already.

Erik had been back at Stockholm for six months when they at last got word from New York that seven years previously the ex-director Joshua Churchill had yielded up his last breath in a hospital on Ninth Avenue, without leaving any heirs, or, most probably, anything for them to inherit. As to the Company's registers, no doubt they had long ago been sold as waste-paper and finished up in the New York tobacco-shops.

The trail thus led nowhere, and the only result of this long investigation was to evoke from Herr Bredejord sarcasms which his friend found very distressing, free from malice though they were.

Erik's story was now common property in the doctor's family. They had no hesitation in discussing it openly, and every phase of the investigation was canvassed at the table or in the parlour. Perhaps the doctor had been better advised two years before, when he had kept the matter secret, for it gave material for gossip on the part of Fru Greta and Kajsa, and for meditations of that of Erik. These were often melancholy indeed not to know his parents if they were still alive—to reflect that he might never know the secret of his birth, was already painful enough in itself. But what he found even more distressing was not to know the country he belonged to.

'The poorest street-urchin, the most wretched peasant, at least knows what his country is and what great human family he belongs to!' he sometimes reflected as he turned the problem over in his mind. 'But I don't! I'm on this terrestrial globe like—like salvage—like a grain of dust swept along by

the wind without knowing whence it comes! I haven't any roots, any traditions, any past! The land where my mother was born, where she now rests, or will rest, perhaps dishonoured and trampled underfoot by the foreigner, without my being there to defend it and to shed my blood for her!'

Poor Erik found such thought distressing. At those moments it was in vain he told himself that he had found a mother in Fru Katrina, a home with Captain Hersebom, a fatherland in Norway, it was in vain he swore that he would return their goodness a hundredfold, be one of Norway's most devoted sons, he still felt his position keenly.

It only took the differences in appearance that he could see between those around him and himself, only the colour of his eyes and skin, glimpsed when he passed a mirror or a shop-window, to bring back that distressing thought. Sometimes he asked himself which country he would prefer to belong to if he had any choice, and it was from this point of view that he studied history and geography, passing in review the world's civilisation and peoples. He felt a sort of consolation in being able to assure himself that at least he was of the Celtic race, and he sought in his books for confirmation of what the doctor had told him.

But when that savant declared that to his mind he was certainly Irish, Erik felt a pang at his heart. Why, among all the Celtic peoples, did he really have to choose the most oppressed? If only he were certain of this, to be sure he would have loved that unhappy country as though it were the equal of the greatest and most illustrious. But that proof was lacking!

But why could he not rather have been French, for example? There were Celts in France, too! This was a country to which he would have gladly belonged, with her splendid traditions, her stirring history and the harvest of ideals which she had sown in the world! Oh how passionately he would have loved, how devotedly he would have served, such a country! How proud he would have been to belong to her! With what filial tenderness he would have studied her glorious annals, read the works of her authors, admired those of her artists! Alas, it was just these delicate emotions that were closed to him forever! He could see that this problem of his origin would never be solved, for so many researches had led to nothing!

And yet he could not help thinking that if he could personally retrace the origin of the information they had already obtained, and himself follow any new trails which it might indicate, this perhaps might lead to something? Would he not take to the task an ardour, a determination to succeed, that nothing else could replace?

This idea at last obsessed him, and almost unconsciously it began to affect his actions, and almost unknown to himself it gave a special direction to his thoughts. As though it were already decided that he was to travel, he entered upon a serious study of cosmography, geography, navigation, all the programme in fact of a naval college.

'Some day,' he told himself, 'I shall qualify as a deep-sea captain, and then I'll be able to go to New York at my own expense, and make a fresh start on the enquiries about the *Cynthia*.'

It was quite natural that the scheme should express itself in his conversation, and he admitted it quite candidly.

Dr. Schwaryencrona, Herr Bredejord and Professor Hochstedt ended by adopting the same view. The question of Erik's origin, which at first they had looked at only as an interesting problem, was more and more becoming a matter of personal concern to them. They realised how much Erik had it at heart, and, as they loved him sincerely, as they felt the importance he attached to it, they were inclined to do anything that would throw a light on the mystery.

So at last they thought of going together to New York for a holiday, to see for themselves whether they could get any further information.

Who was the first to put it into words? This point still remains obscure, and it long formed a matter for discussion between the doctor and Herr Bredejord; each claimed the priority. No doubt it had come to both of them at once, for Erik had thought of it so much that he had saturated the air with it. So it was that the plan embodied itself in words, that it was definitely adopted, and that during the September of the following year the three friends, together with Erik, embarked at Christiania for the United States.

Ten days later they arrived in New York, and without further delay they got into touch with Messrs. Jeremy Smith,

Walker & Co., from whom the first information had been received.

Thenceforth a new factor, whose strength they had never suspected, came into play. This was the personal activity of Erik. At New York, and in the United States, of all the new sights which were so new to him, he especially noticed those which bore on the object of his quest. Up at day-break, he hastened to the port, patrolling the quays, visiting the ships in the harbour, unceasingly looking for and collecting the most minute scraps of information.

'Do you know anything about the Canadian Transport Company? Can you tell me about any officer or passenger or seaman who ever sailed on the *Cynthia*?

Thanks to his perfect knowledge of English, to his grave but pleasant face, and to his familiarity with matters relating to the sea, he received a welcome everywhere. He was told of several of the Company's former officers, seamen, or employees. Sometimes he was able to hunt them out. Sometimes all trace of them was lost.

But none of them could give him any helpful information about the *Cynthia's* last voyage. It took fifteen days of comings and goings, of ceaseless enquiries, to arrive at last upon information whose precision cut clean through the confused mass of somewhat contradictory rumours which was all he could gather. This information, indeed, seemed worth its weight in gold.

It was ascertained that a seaman called Patrick O'Donaghan had survived the wreck of the *Cynthia*, and even that he had returned to New York several times since it had taken place. This Patrick O'Donaghan, it was said, had served on the *Cynthia* during her last voyage. He had been specially assigned to the captain's service and so, in all probability, he must have known the first-class passengers, who always dined with the officers. And, to judge by the fine quality of its clothing, nobody could doubt that the child who had been tied to the *Cynthia's* buoy belonged to that category. It was hence of the greatest importance to find this seaman.

That was the conclusion which the others arrived at when Erik informed them of this discovery. Almost at once, however, the discussion wandered, because the doctor wanted to

get something out of this new factor in support of his favourite theory.

'If ever a name was Irish,' he exclaimed, 'to be sure it's that of Patrick O'Donoghlan. I told you there was something Irish about this business!'

'Well, I don't see that,' Herr Bredejord smiled at him. 'An Irish sailor doesn't prove very much, and to my mind the difficulty would be to find any American ship that hadn't a son of Erin in her crew.'

There was material here to keep them arguing for several hours and they didn't waste it. From that day onwards Erik concentrated his efforts on the one aim: to find Patrick O'Donoghlan. He did not succeed, it is true, but by dint of investigating and making enquiries he at last found, on the Hudson Quay, a seaman who had known the said personage and could give a few details about him.

Patrick O'Donoghlan was a true Irishman, a native of Innishannon, in the County of Cork. He was a man of thirty-three to thirty-five years, of medium height, with red hair and dark eyes, and with his nose flattened in an accident.

'Fellow you'd recognise among twenty thousand!' the seaman added. 'I remember him quite well, although I haven't seen him for the last seven or eight years.'

'It's at New York you usually meet him?'

'New York and other places. But to be sure the last time I found him it was in New York.'

'Could you tell me of anyone who would put me in touch with him?'

'My word, no. Unless it's the landlord of the *Red Anchor*, in Brooklyn! Patrick O'Donoghlan stayed there whenever he landed in New York. It's a Mr. Bowles, an old sailor. And if he doesn't know I can't see who else could tell you where O'Donoghlan is!'

Erik rushed off to catch one of the steam-ferries which serve the Eastern River, and twenty minutes later he was in Brooklyn.

Seated at the door of the *Red Anchor* he found a respectable-looking old woman, busy peeling potatoes.

'Is Mr. Bowles at home, madam?' Erik greeted her with all the politeness characteristic of his adopted country.

'He is at home, but's having his afternoon sleep,' she glanced inquisitively at the newcomer. 'If you've got anything to say to him you can tell me. I'm Mrs. Bowles!'

'Oh, madam, you'll be able to give me as much information as Mr. Bowles could,' Erik continued. 'I want to find out if you know a sailor called Patrick O'Donoghlan. Is he staying with you, or could you tell me where I'll find him?'

'Patrick O'Donoghlan? Yes, I know him! But it's five or six years since he set foot in here! And as to telling you where he is, I really couldn't!'

Erik's expression showed so deep a disappointment that the lady noticed this and seemed to feel touched.

'You really must want to meet Patrick O'Donoghlan, as you're so disappointed not to find him?' she asked.

'I very much want to find him, Madam,' Erik replied sadly.

He alone can help me solve a problem that I've been trying to clear up all my life!'

During the three weeks which Erik had spent looking for information on all sides he had acquired a certain experience of human nature. He saw that in Mrs. Bowles curiosity was keenly aroused, and reflected that there was no reason why he should not reply to her questions. So he asked if he could have a glass of mineral-water to refresh him, and when she replied in the affirmative he entered the inn.

The room was furnished with tables in polished wood and straw-seated chairs, but it was completely empty. This very fact emboldened him to have a talk with the old lady when she emerged from the cellar with the stone bottle

'You'll be wondering, no doubt, Madam,' he began in his gentle voice, 'what I want with Patrick O'Donoghlan. Well, here it is. It seems he was there when the *Cynthia* was shipwrecked, seventeen years ago, off the coast of Norway. Well, I—I myself—I was rescued by a Norwegian fisherman, who had found me when I was quite small, about nine months old, in a cradle which was afloat and tied on to one of the *Cynthia's* buoys. I'm looking for Patrick O'Donoghlan, hoping that he'll be able to give me some information regarding my family, or my country at least!'

A cry uttered by Mrs. Bowles cut his explanation short. 'On a buoy, you say! You were fastened on to a buoy?'

And without waiting for a reply she ran to the stairway.

'Bowles! Bowles! come down quickly,' she cried in a piercing tone, 'On the buoy! You were the child on the buoy! Who would have expected such a thing?' she repeated, going back towards Erik, who had turned pale with surprise and hope.

A heavy step was heard on the wooden stairway, and soon an old man, rather small and rotund, clad in a suit of thick blue cloth, his red face framed in a pair of great white whiskers, his ears garnished with ear-rings, appeared on the threshold.

'What? What's up? What's happening?' he asked, rubbing his eyes.

'It's because we want you!' Mrs. Bowles replied in peremptory tones. Sit down here and listen to this gentleman, who's going to tell you what he's just told me.'

Mr. Bowles meekly obeyed. Erik sat down, and repeated what he had just told the good lady.

On this Mr. Bowles' face expanded like a full moon, and he rubbed his hands as he looked at his wife. She, on her part, seemed no less satisfied.

'Dare I think you know my story already?' Erik's heart was throbbing.

Mr. Bowles made an affirmative gesture and scratched his ear. At last he made up his mind to speak.

'I know it without really knowing it,' he replied, 'and my wife knows it too. We've often spoken of it without knowing anything about it.'

Erik, pale and his teeth clenched, waited for matters to be explained. But he had to wait. Mr. Bowles had neither the gift of eloquence nor that of lucidity. What was more, his ideas might have been disturbed by sleepiness. Before he was fully awake, after he'd had a sleep, he usually needed two or three glasses of a liquid rejoicing in the name of 'Pick me up,' with a striking resemblance to gin.

It was only when his wife had placed the bottle and two glasses before him that the worthy man made up his mind to speak.

He then embarked on a very confused narrative, upon which several facts floated in the midst of an infinity of minute

details. It lasted no less than two hours. It needed all the attention and the intense interest which poor Erik could give to get anything out of it. By dint of urgent questions, and thanks to the assistance of Mrs. Bowles, he at last managed to get somewhere.

CHAPTER IX

FIVE HUNDRED POUNDS REWARD

PATRICK O'DONOGHAN, so far as Erik could make out from the reticence and digressions of Mr. Bowles, had hardly been a model of virtue. The innkeeper at the *Red Anchor* had known him as ship's boy, deck-hand, and able seaman, both before and after the shipwreck of the *Cynthia*. Before that incident, the man had been as poor as sailors usually are. After the shipwreck, however, he had returned to Europe with a great wad of bank-notes, claiming that he had received a legacy in Ireland--which hardly seemed likely.

Bowles had never believed in that legacy. He even thought that so sudden a fortune might have had something--though something hardly creditable--to do with the shipwreck. For O'Donoghon had certainly been involved in it, and--unlike most other seamen in such a position--he had carefully avoided talking about it. He always changed the subject, rather clumsily, whenever the question was raised.

He had even taken care to make off, signing on for an ocean voyage, when the action was brought by the Insurance company against the *Cynthia's* owners--so as to avoid getting mixed up in it, were this only as witness. This conduct had seemed the more suspicious in that O'Donoghon, so far as was known, had been the crew's only survivor. Bowles had never known how the business had ended; but he and his wife had always thought there was something underhand about it.

What made it seem even more suspicious was that Patrick, all the time he had stayed in New York, had never been short of money. He never brought much back from his travels. But

a few days after his return he never lacked gold or dollar-bills, and whenever he was drunk, which was fairly often, he boasted of having a secret that was worth a fortune. And the phrase that always cropped up in his rambling talk was 'the kid on the buoy.'

'The kid on the buoy!' he would say, hammering on the table. 'That kid on the buoy was worth his weight in gold!' And thereupon he would snigger, very pleased with himself.

Nobody had ever been able to get out of him any explanation of these words, which for years on end had formed a subject for endless guesswork in the Bowles household.

Hence the emotion Mrs. Bowles had felt when Erik had explained that he happened to be that famous 'kid on the buoy.'

For more than fifteen years O'Donoghane had been in the habit of staying at the *Red Anchor* whenever he was in New York, but he had not been seen there for over four years. And once more, according to Bowles, there was something suspicious about this. One evening the Irishman had received a visitor, who had been shut up with him for nearly an hour. At the end of that visit O'Donoghane, excited and in a great hurry, had at once paid his reckoning, taken his kit-bag, and left.

He had never been seen since.

Mr. and Mrs. Bowles naturally had no idea what had caused his sudden departure. But they had always thought that it had had something to do with the shipwreck, and with his story of 'the kid on the buoy.' Their opinion was that the visitor had come to warn the Irishman that he was in some serious danger, and that the man had at once thought it best to leave New York.

Neither of the Bowles thought that he had ever returned since then. There had been other guests at their inn, they said, who would have been very surprised if Patrick had stayed elsewhere than at the *Red Anchor*, and they would certainly have asked him why.

Such was all that Erik could get out of them, and he was anxious to pass it on to his friends. So he requested the Bowles' permission to go and look for them.

His report was naturally welcomed with all the interest which it deserved. For the first time, after so many enquiries, they were on the track of a man who had made repeated refer-

ences to 'the kid on the buoy.' Admittedly they did not know where that man was, but they could hope to find him one of these days. Nothing else of such importance had so far happened. The matter seemed so serious that they decided to send a wire to Mrs. Bowles, asking her to serve a dinner for six. Herr Bredejord had suggested this method of getting out of these good people all they could possibly know; they would visit them, make them their guests at the meal, and then they could talk.

Erik hardly expected to learn anything fresh. He knew the Bowles well enough to be certain that they had already told him all they knew. But he relied upon Herr Bredejord's experience of interrogating witnesses in the law-courts to get information out of them which they had hardly realised they knew.

Mrs. Bowles surpassed herself. She laid the table in the best room on the first floor, and in less than an hour she had improvised an excellent dinner. Highly flattered at being asked to take a place at it with her husband, she lent herself very willingly to be questioned by the eminent lawyer, who got out of her several facts which were not without their importance.

First of all, Patrick O'Donoghane had said in so many words when the law-suit had been impending, that he was going off 'so as not to be called as a witness.' Proof positive that he did not care to explain himself regarding the circumstances of the shipwreck --as indeed had been shown by the rest of his conduct.

Moreover, it was certainly in New York or thereabouts that they might find the source of that highly suspicious income that he had been getting from some person unknown. For whenever he arrived he never had money; and one evening, after spending the afternoon outdoors, he returned with his pockets full of gold. Nobody could doubt that the secret referred to 'the kid on the buoy' for he himself had admitted this more than once.

Patrick O'Donoghane must have tried to get something further out of the secret, and the very attempt seemed to have brought about a crisis. On the very eve of his hasty departure, indeed, he had announced that he was too tired to go to sea; and that he counted on henceforth living in New York on his income.

Finally, the individual who had come to see him must have had an interest in making him go. The very next day he had come to the *Red Anchor* to ask for the Irishman, and he had seemed very pleased not to find him there. Bowles felt quite sure he would be able to recognise this individual, whose gait and manner suggested that he was a detective or a member of the police.

From these circumstances Herr Bredejord concluded that Patrick must have been deliberately terrified by the very person from whom he had received the money during his stay in New York, and who had no doubt sent this detective to threaten him with criminal proceedings. This alone could explain why after that visit the man had set off in such a hurry and had never come back.

So it was important to get the detective's description just as much as that of Patrick O'Donoghane. Mr. and Mrs. Bowles could give it in some detail. And by consulting their account-book they could then give the exact date of the Irishman's departure; this had been three years and eight months previously, and not five or six years as they had supposed.

Dr. Schwaryencrona was at once struck by the fact that this date, and therefore that of the detective's visit, corresponded exactly with that of the first advertisement issued in Great Britain for news of the *Cynthia's* survivors. The agreement was so striking that it was impossible not to establish a correlation between the two phenomena.

So they seemed to be getting some light on the problem. The abandonment of Erik on a buoy must have been the result of some crime—a crime of which O'Donoghane, then serving on the *Cynthia*, had been either the witness or the perpetrator. He must have known its instigator, who had been living in or near New York, and for a long time he had exploited this secret. Then at last a day had come when, weary of the Irishman's demands and confronted by the notices in the paper, the man had scared Patrick enough to induce him to make off.

Anyhow, and even bearing in mind that these deductions were not rigorously proved, there were all the elements of a serious judicial enquiry. So Erik and his friends left the *Red Anchor* with good hopes of reaching some conclusion.

Next day Herr Bredejord got an introduction from the

Swedish representative to the Superintendent of the New York Police, and put him in possession of these facts. Meanwhile he got into touch with the legal representatives of the Insurance Company which had gone to law with the *Cynthia's* owners, and succeeded in extracting the records of the trial from the dusty files in which they had been sleeping for so long.

But an examination of all these papers disclosed no document of any importance; nowhere had been produced any witness of the shipwreck. The whole business had turned on points of law and on the inflated figures for which ship and cargo had been insured compared to their real value: Her owners could neither prove their good faith nor explain the cause of the shipwreck. Their defence having seemed on the whole weak, the court had awarded the verdict to their opponents. On the other hand, the insurance company had found itself compelled to pay several claims on their life-policies made by the heirs of certain of the passengers. But nowhere, during the court case or the circumstances which led up to it, was there the slightest mention of a nine-month old child.

The examination took several days. It had just been completed when Herr Bredejord was asked to pay a call on the Superintendent of Police, who told him that, to his great regret, he had not been able to learn anything. Nobody in New York knew any detective, official or otherwise, who corresponded to the description given by Mr. Bowles.

Nor had anyone been able to give the slightest indication of any person who had an interest in getting rid of Patrick O'Donoghane, who did not seem to have set foot in New York for at least four years. As the Superintendent did not hide from Herr Bredejord his opinion that the enquiry seemed to be dead and buried. The facts went so far back—almost indeed to the twenty years after which the case would be statute-barred—that even were the man to return at once, it was at least doubtful whether justice would consent to re-open it.

To sum up; that solution which Erik had fancied within his grasp had completely fallen through, and it might well have eluded him for ever.

All they could do now was to return to Sweden by way of Ireland, to see if by any chance Patrick O'Donoghane had not

gone there merely to plant cabbages. After they had taken their leave of Mr. and Mrs. Bowles, this was what they actually did.

As the steamers from New York to Liverpool always put in at Cork, all the travellers had to do to find themselves within a few miles of Innishannon was to go that way. There they learned, however, that Patrick O'Donoghane had never returned to Ireland since he was twelve, nor had there been any news of him.

'Where are we to look now?' asked the doctor, when they were embarking at London on their way back to Stockholm.

'In the seaports, obviously, and especially in those which aren't American,' Herr Bredejord replied. 'For as we've got to bear in mind, a seaman who began as a cabin-boy doesn't give up his trade when he's thirty-five. It's the only one he knows. So Patrick must still be sailing. And as it's the task of ships to sail from port to port, it's there alone that we can hope to find a seaman. What do you say, Hochstedt?'

'Your reasoning seems correct, though perhaps it's a little too definite?' the professor replied with his usual caution.

'Let's assume it is,' Herr Bredejord continued. 'Given that Patrick O'Donoghane went off under the shock of some real fright, and in all probability under the threat of criminal proceedings, he ought to be afraid of extradition. So there's a good chance that he doesn't want to be recognised, and that he'll keep out of the way of his former shipmates. So he'll prefer to keep to the ports where he wasn't used to putting in.

'That's only a hypothesis, I know; but—assuming provisionally that it's well founded—the number of ports where the Americans don't do business isn't so great that we can't draw up a list fairly easily. I think that's where we ought to start, and first to ask in these ports if they haven't any news of anyone who corresponds to his description.'

'Why not simply rely upon an advertisement?' asked Dr. Schwaryencrona.

'Because Patrick O'Donoghane would take care not to reply if he's gone into hiding—even assuming that it would come to a seaman's attention.'

'What's to keep us from reassuring him in the advertisement, from pointing out that he's sheltered by its being statute

barred, and that it's to his advantage to get in touch with us? '

'That would be better. But get back to my opinion: I'm much afraid that it wouldn't come to the notice of a mere seaman.'

'We could always try offering a reward to Patrick O'Donoghue, and to anyone who can find him. What do you say, Erik? '

'It seems to me that notices like this, if they're to have any effect, ought to be repeated in a large number of journals. That would come very expensive and might frighten him, however enticing we make them, if it's really to his interest to keep in hiding. Wouldn't it be better to entrust someone with the task of making personal enquiries in the ports where we think he's likely to be found? '

'Very well; but where should we find a trustworthy man who could carry out such an enquiry? '

'You've found him already if you like, dear master.' Erik suggested. 'It's myself.'

'You, my dear boy. But what about your studies? '

'My studies needn't suffer. There's nothing to keep me from going on with them as I travel. What's more, I ought to tell you, doctor, I've already made certain of a way of travelling gratis.'

'Yes, but how? ' the other three asked at once.

'Quite simply, by preparing for the examination for a deep-sea captain. I could pass it tomorrow, if I had to. And, once I've got hold of that diploma, nothing would be easier than to find some ship I could embark on as mate for the first of these ports.'

'What! You've done that without telling me? ' the doctor exclaimed; he was half annoyed, though the lawyer and the professor laughed heartily.

'Yes, I have,' Erik replied, 'and I didn't think that my crime would be so very great, because so far it's been limited to asking what I'd have to learn and learning it! I wouldn't have gone in for it without asking your permission, and I'm asking it now.'

'And I'll give it to you, you naughty boy! ' the doctor was appeased by his explanation. 'But when it comes to letting

you set off at once, and by yourself, it's another matter! We ought to wait until you've attained your majority.'

'Oh, that's just what I meant to do,' Erik replied in tones of gratitude and submission that could not be mistaken.

Nonetheless, the doctor did not want to give up his idea. To his mind personal enquiries in the ports would be no more than an expedient. An advertisement, on the other hand, would go everywhere at once. If Patrick O'Donoghlan hadn't gone into hiding, which was quite likely, it ought to reach him at once. If he were in hiding, it might help to find him. After having carefully weighed up these considerations, he drew up an announcement which, translated into seven or eight languages, ought soon to flow to the five quarters of the world on the wings of a hundred of the most widely-read papers:

'PATRICK O'DONOGHAN, a seaman missing from New York during the last four years. A hundred pounds reward to whoever helps to find him. Five hundred pounds for himself, if he gets in touch with the undersigned. There is nothing for him to be afraid of, in view of the lapse of time.

'Dr. Schwaryencrona, Stockholm.'

On the 20th October, the Doctor and his travelling companions were back home. On the next day that notice was deposited at the general publicity agency in Stockholm, and three days later it had already made its appearance in several papers. Erik could not keep back a sigh; he felt a presentiment of final defeat as he read it.

As for Herr Bredejord, he declared flatly that it was the greatest madness on earth, and that he would henceforth consider the matter as closed.

But as events were to show, Erik and Herr Bredejord were mistaken.

CHAPTER X

TUDOR BROWN, ESQ.

ONE MORNING in May the doctor was in his study when the servant brought in a visiting-card. This card, of minute pro-

portions, as they are in Britain, bore a name, *Tudor Brown*, to which were added the words: 'On board the *Albatross*.'

'Tudor Brown?' The doctor ransacked his memory, but without finding anything to fit that name.

'This gentleman wishes to see the Herr Doctor,' replied the servant.

'Couldn't he come at the hours for a consultation?'

'He says it's a personal matter.'

'Then show him in,' the doctor replied.

He raised his head as he heard the door open, and gazed with some surprise at the strange person who responded to the feudal fore-name of Tudor as well as to the very plebian surname of Brown.

Imagine a man of about fifty, his forehead covered with a multitude of little curls of carrotty hue, which the most superficial examination would have shown to consist not of hair but of raw silk, a hooked nose surmounted by a pair of gold-rimmed spectacles of smoked glass; teeth as long as those of a horse; hairless cheeks, enclosed in an enormous shirt collar, from which emerged, below the chin, a tuft of reddish beard; a queer-shaped head, surmounted by a tall hat which seemed to be screwed on, for its owner didn't even pretend to take it off--all this reposing on a big thin body, angular and roughly squared and dressed from top to toe in some woollen material in squares of green and grey. A tie-pin furnished with a diamond as big as a nut, a watch-chain snaking through the folds of a waistcoat with amethyst buttons, a dozen or so rings on fingers as knotted as those of a chimpanzee, completed a whole as pretentious, as heterogenous, as grotesque, as it was possible to see.

This personage entered the doctor's study much as he would a railway-station, without even attempting a greeting. He stopped to say, in a voice like that of Punch, so guttural and at the same time so nasal it was:

'You're Doctor Schwaryencrona?'

'I am,' replied the doctor, taken aback by such manners.

He was already wondering whether he ought not to ring and have this uncouth fellow shown out when a word checked him.

'I saw your advertisement regarding Patrick O'Donaghan,

said the stranger, 'and I thought you'd like to hear what I know about him.'

'Be so good as to sit down, sir,' the doctor was going to reply.

But he saw that the stranger had not waited for his invitation. After having chosen what looked like the most comfortable chair, he was already rolling it up to the doctor; then he deposited himself in it, thrust his hands in his pockets, raised both his heels and placed them on the window-sill nearby; then he looked at the doctor with an air of satisfaction.

'I thought,' he continued, 'that you'd be glad to have these details, as you're offering a hundred pounds to know them. That's why I've brought them to you.'

The doctor bowed without saying a word.

'No doubt,' the other went on in his nasal voice, 'you're wondering who I am. So I've come to tell you. As my card says, I'm called Tudor Brown—British subject.'

'Irish perhaps!' the doctor asked with interest.

The stranger, obviously surprised, paused for a moment, and then replied, 'No, Scottish. Oh, I know that I don't look like it and that you'd be more likely to take me for a Yankee. But that's nothing to do with it. I'm Scottish.'

And, as he reiterated this declaration, he looked at the doctor as though to say: 'You can believe it or not as you like, it's all one to me.'

'From Inverness, perhaps?' the doctor suggested, still riding his favourite hobby-horse.

The stranger again showed a moment's hesitation.

'No, from Edinburgh. But that doesn't matter, after all, and it's nothing to do with the question. I've got private means and I don't owe anything to anybody. If I tell you who I am that's because it suits me to do so, not because I have to.'

'Allow me to point out that I haven't asked you!' smiled the doctor.

'No! Very well then, don't interrupt me and we'll soon get to the point. You published these advertisements to know what's become of Patrick O'Donoghane, didn't you? So you want to get hold of those who know him. Well, I know him!'

'You know him?' the doctor brought his chair up to the stranger's.

'I know him! But before I tell you, I've got to ask you what exactly is your interest in this enquiry.'

'Quite right!' the doctor agreed.

And in a few words he related Erik's story, while his visitor listened with keen interest.

'And that boy is still alive?' he asked.

'Yes, certainly! He's alive, he's in good health, and in October next he's going to start studying medicine at Upsala University.'

'Aha!' the stranger seemed to be meditating. 'But just tell me, haven't you any other means of unravelling the mystery of his birth than by asking Patrick O'Donoghlan?'

'I don't know of any other,' the doctor replied. 'After a long enquiry, I learned that O'Donoghlan was in possession of the secret, and that's why I tried to get news of him in the papers. But it wasn't with any great hope that I'd find out that way.'

'Why?'

'Because I had grounds for thinking that O'Donoghlan had good reasons for hiding, so it's extremely improbable that he'll reply to my advertisements. Later I mean to try some other method. I've got his description. I know what ports he's most likely to frequent, and I mean to make enquiries through special agents.'

The doctor did not say this lightly. He announced it with the express intention of seeing what effect it had on the man in front of him. So he could see quite plainly that in spite of the stranger's assumed indifference, a flicker of his eyelids and a slight tightening of his lips appeared on Tudor Brown's hairless face. But the man recovered almost at once.

'Well, doctor,' he said, 'if you haven't any other way of finding out than by laying your hands on O'Donoghlan, you'll never find out! Patrick O'Donoghlan is dead!'

Surprised and distressed though the doctor was at this news, he did not move a muscle. He contented himself with watching his visitor, who went on:

'Dead and buried! Or rather, dead and drowned three hundred fathoms deep! Chance willed that this man, whose past seemed so mysterious and whose I'd noticed for that very reason, was employed three years ago as a seaman on my

yacht, the *Albatross*. I must explain that my yacht is a serious vessel, on which I can make cruises seven or eight months long.

'Well, it was about three years ago, when we were off Madeira, that the seaman Patrick O'Donoghane fell into the sea. I made the ship heave to and had her boats lowered and they searched so well that he was found and brought back on board and given every care imaginable. But it was in vain. O'Donoghane was dead. We had to give back to the sea that prey we'd tried to tear from its clutches! An account of the accident duly attested is of course set out in the ship's log. Thinking that you might find it useful, I've had a certified copy made and I've brought it to you.'

As he spoke, Tudor Brown undid his portfolio, took out a paper covered with stamps and gave it to the doctor.

The latter scanned it quickly. It was certainly an extract from the ship's log of the *Albatross*, owner Tudor Brown, regarding the death of the Seaman Patrick O'Donoghane off the isle of Madeira. The whole was duly certified under oath by two qualified witnesses as an exact copy of the original, and it had been registered in London at Somerset House by the Commissioners of Her Britannic Majesty.

This document plainly had all the characters of authenticity, but the way it had reached his hands was so strange that the Doctor could not keep himself from expressing aloud the astonishment he felt. He did so, however, with his usual courtesy.

'Allow me to ask one question, just one question, Sir,' he said to his visitor.

'Go on, Doctor.'

'How is it that you've got in your pocket such a document, duly set out and certified and legalised and why are you bringing it to me?'

'If I'm not mistaken that makes two questions,' Tudor Brown replied, 'So I'll deal with them one by one.'

'I've got it in my pocket because I saw your advertisement two months ago, and as I can give you the information you need, I wanted to give it to you as completely and definitely as I can. I brought it you because as I've been cruising in this district on my yacht I found it natural to show it to

you personally so as to satisfy your curiosity and my own at the same time.'

There was nothing to say to such reasoning, so the Doctor went on to the only conclusion he could draw.

'So you're here on the *Albatross*? ' he asked.

'Yes, of course.'

'And you have still got some sailors on board who used to know Patrick O'Donoghlan? '

'I've got several.'

'Will you let me see them? '

'As many as you like. Would you care to come on board at once? '

'If you have no objection.'

'None at all,' and the stranger arose.

Dr. Schwaryencrona set out with Tudor Brown. In five minutes they reached the quay where the *Albatross* was moored. They were received by an old sea-dog with a red face and grey whiskers: his whole expression denoted frankness and loyalty.

'Mr. Ward, here's a gentleman who wants to get some information regarding the fate of Patrick O'Donoghlan,' said Tudor Brown as they went on board.

'Patrick O'Donoghlan,' replied the old seaman, 'God rest his Soul! It gave us quite enough trouble to fish him out that day when he was drowned off the island of Madeira! And what was the good of that, I ask you, because we had to give him back to the fish? '

'You've known him a long time,' asked the Doctor.

'That old shark? Good Lord, no. Only a year, or maybe two. I can remember that it was at Zanzibar that we picked him up. Wasn't that so, Tommy Duff? '

'Who wants me?' asked a young sailor, who was busy polishing the metal bannisters down the companion way.

'Here!' replied the other. 'It really was at Zanzibar, wasn't it, that we picked up Patrick O'Donoghlan? '

'Patrick O'Donoghlan?' replied the sailor, as if his recollection were not too clear. 'Oh yes, I can remember him. That fellow who got killed falling into the water off Madeira. Yes, Mr. Ward, it was at Zanzibar that he came on board.'

Dr. Schwaryencrona asked for a description of Patrick

O'Donoghane and made certain that it conformed to the one he had already. All these people seemed honest and sincere; they had open frank faces. The identity of their replies might well seem a little strange and concerted. But after all, wasn't that the natural consequences of the facts themselves? Only having known the man a year at most, and hardly remembering anything but his description and his death, they knew very little and could only say what they knew.

Moreover, the *Albatross* was a yacht so well looked after that if she had a few guns she would have passed for a warship. The most rigorous cleanliness reigned everywhere. The men were well chosen and well dressed and they must have been splendidly disciplined for they had stayed on duty when with one bound they could have got ashore.

In short, the whole thing had a convincing effect upon the Doctor's mind.

So he declared that he was completely satisfied, and he carried the spirit of sacrifice and hospitality so far that he felt he could not go away without inviting Tudor Brown to dinner; meanwhile the man had been striding back and forwards on the poop whistling.

But Tudor Brown did not think it convenient to accept his invitation. He declined it in these courteous terms, 'No. Can't. Never dine in town.'

The only thing the Doctor could do was to retire. This he did without this strange person's having made the slightest attempt to raise his hat.

His first care was to describe the adventure to Herr Bredejord, who listened without saying a word and merely promised himself to start an inquiry of his own. But when he wanted to begin it that very day along with Erik, who learned everything when he came back from school for the midday meal, he came up against a slight difficulty. The *Albatross* had left Stockholm without saying where she was going and without leaving the address of Mr. Tudor Brown.

So all that came out of it was a duly certified Death Certificate of Patrick O'Donoghane.

But had it any real value? That was what Herr Bredejord allowed himself to doubt, in spite of the witness of the British Consul General at Stockholm, whom he had consulted and

who had verified the perfect authenticity of the stamps and signatures upon the document. He had also sought information in Edinburgh, but there nobody knew Tudor Brown, and this seemed a little suspicious.

But the undeniable fact, against which no opposition was possible, was that they would hear nothing more of Patrick O'Donoghane and that the advertisements would have no further purpose.

So, with the man gone forever, no hope would remain of solving the mystery of Erik's birth. He himself agreed to this and he felt he had to recognise that any further enquiry would be fruitless.

So he made no difficulty, next Autumn, at beginning to study medicine at Upsala University as the doctor wished. First, however, he wanted to pass the examination to qualify as a deep-sea captain. This alone would have sufficed to show that he had not given up his schemes for travelling, but he still had another care at his heart for which he saw no other remedy than to get away. Without the Doctor's realising it, Erik felt a need to find some pretext for leaving his home as soon as his studies were completed, and the only pretext he could find was this plan for going on his travels.

His true reason was the ever-growing aversion which Fröken Kajsa, the Doctor's niece, lost no occasion of showing him, and which he would not at any price have allowed that excellent man to suspect.

His relations with the girl had always been very strange. In Erik's eyes, after seven years, just as on that first day when he had arrived at Stockholm, the little fairy was still the model of every elegance and every earthly perfection. He had vowed an unreserved admiration for her and had made heroic efforts to become her friend.

But Kajsa had never been reconciled to the idea of seeing this 'intruder', as she called him, setting foot in the doctor's house, being treated like an adopted son, and becoming the *protégé* of the three friends. Erik's scholastic success, his good nature, his pleasant character, far from finding favour in her eyes, became instead fresh motives for jealousy. In her heart she could not forgive the boy for being nothing more than a peasant. She felt that this brought shame upon the house and

upon the upper rung she wanted to feel she had reached on the social ladder.

But it was quite another thing when she knew that Erik was even less than a peasant—a foundling. This seemed to her at once monstrous and dishonouring. She was not far from thinking that the foundling took a place, in the hierarchy of creatures, below the cat and the dog. And this feeling manifested itself by the most disdainful looks, the most mortifying silences, the most cruel snubs. Was Erik invited along with her to a children's party in a friend's house? She refused point blank to dance with him. At meals she made a point of never replying to what he said, of not taking any notice of him. She always went out of her way to humiliate him.

Poor Erik had guessed the reason for this somewhat uncharitable conduct, but he could not understand why this frightful misfortune of not knowing who his family were and what his country was should be turned into a grievance against him. He had tried to reason with Kajsa, to make her understand the injustice and the cruelty of such a prejudice: but she would not even deign to listen to him. The bigger the two children grew, the wider seemed to be the gulf which separated them. When she was eighteen, Kajsa had entered the great world, where she was made a fuss of and praised like an heiress; and this adulation confirmed her opinion that she was made of quite a different clay from the general run of mortals.

Erik, at first distressed by her disdain, had ended by deeming it unworthy and by swearing to overcome it. His feelings of humiliation had indeed played a great part in producing the passionate ardour he brought to his studies. He dreamed of rising so high in the public esteem by sheer force of work that people would have to recognise him, but he swore also to go away as soon as he could and not to stay a day longer under this roof where every day was marked for him by a secret humiliation. The only thing was that it was essential for the good Doctor not to realise his motives for going away. He must attribute it only to his passion for travel.

And that was why Erik often spoke, when he had finished his studies, of taking part in some scientific expedition. This was why, even while he was still following the course of the Upsala Medical School, he made ready, by the most severe

work and exercise, for the life of fatigue and peril which is the lot of the great travellers.

CHAPTER XI

WE HEAR FROM THE *VEGA* . . .

IT WAS December 1878, and Erik had just reached his twentieth year and had passed the first examination for his doctorate.

Almost the only preoccupation of the Swedish savants, and one might almost say of the whole world, was the great Arctic exploration of the navigator Nordenskiöld. After preparing for this enterprise by making several voyages into the Polar regions, after having thoroughly investigated every aspect of the problem, he was once more going to try to discover the North-east Passage from the Atlantic to the Pacific, which for three centuries had defeated every effort of the maritime nations.

The plan for this expedition had been discussed by the Swedish navigator in an authoritative memoir, in which he explained the reasons which led him to believe that the North-east Passage was practicable in summer, as well as the method by which he hoped to accomplish this geographical *desideratum*. The intelligent generosity of two Scandinavian ship-owners and the help of the Swedish Government had enabled him to organise the expedition under the conditions he thought best fitted to ensure his success.

It was on 21st July, 1878, that Nordenskiöld had left Tromsø, on the *Vega*, to try to reach the Behring Strait by going to the north of Russia and Siberia. Lieutenant Palanders, of the Swedish Navy, commanded the vessel, which carried, along with the leader who had inspired the voyage, a whole staff of botanists, geologists, doctors, and astronomers.

The *Vega*, specially equipped for the expedition to the plans of Nordenskiöld himself, was a vessel of 500 tons, recently built at Bremen and provided with a screw driven by an engine

of 60 horse-power. Three coalers were to accompany her as far as three assigned and successive points on the Siberian coast. Should it become necessary to winter during the journey, everything had been provided for a two years' voyage. But Nordenskiöld did not conceal his hopes that thanks to the steps he had taken he would reach Behring Strait before the Autumn, and his hope was shared by all Sweden.

Having sailed from the most northerly port of Norway, the *Vega* arrived, on 29th July, at Novaja Zemle, on 1st August at the Kara Sea, on 6th August at the mouth of the Yenisei. On 9th August she doubled Cape Tchelvnskin—the North-east Cape—the farthest point of the Old World, which no vessel had yet reached. On 7th September she moored at the mouth of the Lena and parted company with the third of her coalers. And on the 16th October a telegram, taken to Irkoutsk by this vessel, announced to the world the success of the first part of the expedition.

It is easy to imagine the impatience with which the navigators' many friends were waiting for the details of the voyage. These did not arrive until the first days of December. For, if electricity crossed space with the speed of thought, it was not so for the Siberian post. The letters from the *Vega*, sent off from Irkoutsk at the same time as the telegram, took more than six weeks to reach Stockholm. But at last they arrived, and from the 5th December one of the great Swedish newspapers published an account of the first stages of the voyage, emanating from the pen of a young medical officer attached to the expedition.

That very day, while at lunch, Herr Bredejord, the lawyer was busy reading with a very lively interest the details given in these four columns, when his eyes fell upon a paragraph which gave him a start. He re-read it more carefully, then re-read it again; then, suddenly jumping up, he snatched at his cloak and his hat, and reached Dr. Schwaryencrona's in one bound.

'Have you read the letters from the *Vega*?' he shouted, as he dashed like a hurricane into the *matsal*, where his friend was having lunch with Kajsa.

'I've only just begun them,' the doctor replied, 'and I mean to finish reading them when I smoke my pipe.'

'Then you haven't seen them?' repeated Herr Bredejord,

who was still out of breath, 'you haven't seen what's in them?'

'No,' Dr. Schwaryencrona replied quite calmly.

'Well, just listen to this,' Herr Bredejord went over to the window. 'It's the journal of one of our confrères, an assistant naturalist on board the *Vega*. Just listen to this:

'July 30th and 31st. We entered Jugor Strait, and moored off a Samoyede village called Chabarova. Landed. Examined a few natives to verify by the Holmgren method the development of their sense of colour. Found it normally developed. Bought two magnificent salmon from a Samoyede fisherman.'

'I beg your pardon,' the doctor interrupted him with a smile. 'Is this a charade? I must say that the interest of these details eludes me.'

'Oh, interest of these details eludes you!' Herr Bredejord exclaimed triumphantly. 'Well, just wait and you'll see!'

'Bought from a Samoyede fisherman two splendid salmon of a species not yet defined, which I have kept for our alcohol-vat, in spite of the protests of the master-cook. Incident: this fisherman fell into the sea as he left the ship, just as we were about to sail. He was fished out half asphyxiated, stiffened by the cold like a bar of iron, and, to cap it all, wounded in the head. Taken unconscious to the *Vega's* sick-bay, undressed and put to bed, we found that this Samoyede fisher was a European. He had red hair, his nose had been flattened by an accident and on his chest, on a level with his heart, these words were tattooed on a shield: *Patrick O'Donoghane, Cynthia*.'

At this point Dr. Schwaryencrona gave a shout of surprise.

'Wait, here's the rest of it,' said Herr Bredejord and he went on reading:

'Under the action of energetic massage he returned to life. But it is impossible to land him in that state. We keep him. He is feverish and delirious. So here are our experiments on the colour-sense of the Samoyedes strangely frustrated.'

'August 3rd. The fisherman from Chabarove is completely recovered. He seemed surprised to find himself on board the *Vega* and bound for Cape Tchelyuskin, but he soon found his place. His knowledge of the Samoyede language may be

useful to us, so we have persuaded him to traverse coast of Siberia with us. He speaks English with a nasal accent like the Yankees, claims to be a Scotsman, and calls himself Johnny Bowles. He says that he came to Novaya Zemle with the Russian fishers and settled down in this neighbourhood a dozen years ago. The name tattooed upon his chest, he told us, is that of one of his childhood's friends, dead a long time ago.'

'That must be our man!' exclaimed the doctor, in the grip of his feelings.

'Could there be any doubt about it?' replied the lawyer. 'The name, the ship, the description—they're all there. There isn't anything lacking—the choice of his pseudonym, this anxiety to affirm that Patrick O'Donoghane is dead—to give us proof in abundance!'

They fell silent, pondering over the possible consequences of this revelation.

'But how are we going to search so far away?' the doctor asked at last.

'It's obviously going to be difficult,' Herr Bredejord replied, 'But anyhow, it's something already to know that he's still alive and what part of the world he's in! And, anyhow, we've got to reckon with the unforeseen. He may have stayed on board the *Vega* to the end of the voyage and will come to Stockholm to bring us the explanation we need! But if not, perhaps sooner or later we'll find some opportunity of getting in touch with him. Voyages to Novaya Zemle are going to become more frequent because of Nordenskiöld's very expedition. The shipowners are already talking of sending ships to the mouth of the Yenisei every year.'

On such a theme discussion might have gone on for ever, and the two friends were still carrying it on when, at two o'clock, Erik arrived from Upsala. He too had read this great news, and he had caught the train without losing an instant.

'Do you know what I'm afraid of now?' he asked the others. 'I'm afraid the *Vega's* met with some misfortune. Remember that we've reached the fifth of December, and that the leaders of the expedition counted on arriving before October at the Behring Strait! If this forecast had been realised, we should have known it by now, for long before this the *Vega*

would have reached Japan, or at least Petropaulsk, on the Aleutian Islands, a Pacific station whence we'd have had news of her.

'Now these despatches and letters come by way of Irkoutsk are dated from the seventh of September, which means that for three whole months nobody knows what's become of the *Vega*—which means that she didn't reach the Behring Strait in time—which means that she must have suffered the common fate of all the expeditions which for the last three hundred years have tried to find the North-east Passage! That's the deplorable conclusion that forces itself upon me!'

'The *Vega* might have had to winter in the ice—this was something they had to foresee,' the doctor objected

'Obviously, but that's the most favourable view, and wintering can be surrounded with so many dangers that it's almost equivalent to a shipwreck. Anyhow, there's one fact that's beyond all doubt, and that is that if we ever have any news from the *Vega* again, we shan't have them before next summer.'

'But why?'

'For the very good reason that if she hasn't perished, she must be shut in the ice, and she won't be able to get out until June or July, even putting things at their very best!'

'That's true,' Herr Bredejord agreed.

'And what conclusion do you draw from your reasoning?' asked the Doctor, uneasy at the abrupt tones in which Erik had been speaking.

'My conclusion is that it's impossible for me to wait so long, without settling a question that's so full of importance.'

'What do you want to do? You've got to accept the inevitable.'

'So long as that inevitable isn't more apparent than real!' replied Erik. 'The letters have arrived from the Arctic Ocean by way of Irkoutsk! Why shouldn't I go back myself by the same route? I'd follow the Siberian coast! I'd try to find out from the local people, to ask whether they've any news of a vessel shipwrecked or trapped in the ice! Then perhaps I'd succeed in discovering Nordenskiöld and Patrick O'Donoghue! That's an enterprise we've got to attempt!'

'In mid-winter?'

1

‘Why not? It’s a favourable season for sledge-travel in the high latitudes.’

‘Yes, but you’re forgetting that you aren’t there yet, in those high latitudes, and that the spring will get there before you do.’

‘That’s true.’ Erik had to recognise the force of this objection. And he stayed with his eyes fixed on the carpet, absorbed in his thoughts.

‘No matter!’ he burst out suddenly. ‘Nordenskiöld’s got to be found, and Patrick O’Donaghan with him! They shall be, or it won’t be my fault!’

Erik’s idea was quite simple. It consisted merely in making known to the Stockholm newspapers, in the form of an impersonal letter, the dilemma regarding the probable fate of the *Vega*: Either she had perished, or she was still shut up in the ice; the letter would end by explaining the need to go to her rescue.

His reasoning was quite sound, and the interest taken in Nordenskiöld’s attempt was so universal that the young Upsala student was certain to see the question discussed ardently in scientific circles. But the effect went beyond his wildest hopes. All the newspapers, without exception, discussed it and approved of it. The leading thinkers and the whole mass of the nation took it to heart. Public opinion declared itself unanimously in favour of a rescue expedition. Committees were formed, subscription-lists opened to prepare it. Commerce, industry, the schools, the law-courts, and all classes wanted a share in the enterprise. A rich ship-owner offered to equip a vessel at his own expense; she would set off on the track of the *Vega*, and he would call her the *Nordenskiöld*.

The enthusiasm was bound to increase as the days elapsed without bringing any definite news of Nordenskiöld. By the end of December, the subscriptions had already reached a considerable figure. Dr. Schwaryencrona and the lawyer Bredejord headed the list with a subscription of ten thousand kroners each, and they sat on the organising committee, which had chosen Erik as secretary.

He was really the soul of the enterprise. His enthusiasm, his modesty, his obvious competence on all relevant questions, which he continually studied and investigated, soon gained him the most decisive influence. Right from the outset he had

never concealed his dream, which was to form one of the expeditions, were it only as an ordinary seaman; nor that he had a special personal interest in it; and this indeed added weight to the excellent ideas which he laid before the organisers of the enterprise. So he directed all the preliminary work in person.

First it was agreed that a second ship should be added to the *Nordenskiöld* so that the search could be completed; and that like the *Vega* this vessel should be a steamship. Norden-skiöld himself had shown that the main cause of failure in all the previous attempts had been the use of sailing-ships. The Arctic navigators, especially on a voyage of exploration, have indeed every interest in not being subordinated to the wind; in being able to rely on an average speed and if necessary to increase their pace to clear a dangerous passage; and, finally and above all, in being able always to look for the open sea where it is—a power often impossible to sails.

This basic point settled, it was also decided that the ship should be covered with a sheathing of green oak six inches thick and divided into watertight compartments; this would make her independent of local damage caused by contact with the ice. She should have only a small draught, and her construction should be arranged with a view to carrying a relatively large provision of coal.

Out of all the offers made to the Committee, its choice fell on a schooner of 540 tons, recently built at Bremen, that a crew of eighteen could easily handle. While keeping her masts she would be provided with a steam-engine of 48 h.p. and with a screw so secured that it could be taken on board if the ice were to endanger it. The furnace of one of her boilers would be constructed so that if the coal should run out it would be able to burn the oils or fats that are easy to obtain in the Arctic region. Protected by its oak sheathing, her hull would moreover be reinforced by transversal beams so as to offer a strong resistance to the pressure of the ice-floes. Finally, her bow would be armoured and armed with a steel ram to cut itself a lead through the very ice-bank, so long as the thickness of this did not exceed the vessel's draught.

The schooner, bought and put into dry dock, was named the *Alaska*, because of the direction in which she was to sail. It

had been decided that while the *Nordenskiöld* should set off by the same route as the *Vega*, the second vessel should sail round the world the opposite way, so as to reach the Siberian Ocean by the Alaskan peninsula and the Behring Strait. The chances of finding the Swedish expedition if it were in trouble, or its tracks if it had perished, would thus be doubled: while one of the ships would follow behind it, the other would meet it from ahead.

Erik, to whom this idea was due, had often asked himself to which of these two directions he would give the preference, and he had ended by choosing the second.

'The *Nordenskiöld*' he explained, 'will follow the same route as the *Vega*. So it is essential that she should be just as fortunate as her predecessor during the first part of the voyage, if only to enable her to double Cape Tchelynskin. And nothing will prove that she will succeed in getting so far, as this result has only been attained once! On the other hand, according to the latest news, the *Vega* is not much more than two or three hundred leagues from the Behring Strait, so by arriving there before her on that route there are more chances of meeting her. The *Nordenskiöld* could follow it for months together without reaching her, even putting things at their best. But those who sail in the opposite direction can't fail to meet her, if she still exists, because she's following the Siberian Coast.'

And in Erik's eyes the great thing was to meet the *Vega* as early as possible so as to find Patrick O'Donaghan, likewise as early as possible. The Doctor and Herr Bredejord fully approved of these reasons when they had had them explained.

Meantime, the works of adaptation of the *Alaska* were actively pushed forward; the supplies, the food, the clothing, were chosen conformably to the principles consecrated by experience; the crew was composed of the finest sailors, hardened to the cold by their fishing seasons off Iceland or Greenland. Above all the Commander, chosen by the Committee, was an Officer of the Swedish Navy at present in the service of a shipping company and well known for his voyages in the Arctic seas, Lieutenant Marsilas. He was to have as his first mate Erik himself, obviously fitted for this post by the energy he had placed at the service of the enterprise, and furthermore

qualified by his certificate as a deep-sea captain. As second and third mates, two experienced seamen were chosen.

The *Alaska* was to carry explosives in case the ice had to be blown up, as well as abundant supplies of antiscorbutics to combat the maladies common in the Arctic. She was furnished with a heat-regulating system to keep a mild regular temperature in every latitude. She was also equipped with that portable observatory called a crow's nest which is hoisted to the summit of the main mast in the vicinity of floating ice, to watch for the onset of the icebergs. At Erik's suggestion, that observatory was given a powerful electric searchlight generated by the vessel's engines; this would enable her route to be lit up during the night. Seven ship's boats, including two whalers and a steam-cutter, six sledges were also embarked with a pair of *schne-scheu* or snow-shoes for every man of the crew, together with four gatling guns, thirty repeating rifles, and the necessary ammunition.

These preparations were almost complete when Captain Hersebom and his son Otto, arriving from Norway with their great dog Klaas, requested the favour of being engaged as seamen on the *Alaska*. A letter from Erik had made them realise the immense personal interest which he took in this voyage, and they wanted to share its perils with him. Captain Hersebom stressed his experience off Greenland and explained how useful his dog Klaas could be as leader in a sledge team. Otto had only to adduce his excellent health, his herculean strength, and his devotion. Thanks to the support they received from the Doctor and Herr Bredejord, all three were accepted by the Committee.

At the beginning of February 1879 all was in readiness; the *Alaska* had thus five full months in which to reach Behring Strait by the end of June, the season regarded as most favourable for its exportation. She was to sail by the most direct route—down the Mediterranean and the Suez Canal and across the Indian Ocean and the China Seas, calling at several ports to re-fuel.

From all these ports the *Alaska* would get in touch with Stockholm by telegraph, and it was of course agreed that if meanwhile news arrived of the *Vega* she would not fail to be notified.

The voyage of the *Alaska* on an Arctic expedition was thus to commence by one across the tropical seas and along the coast of those continents which are most favoured by the sun. This programme had not been drawn up at random; it was the result of imperious necessity, as it was a matter of reaching the Behring Strait by the shortest route, and meanwhile in staying, up to the last moment, in telegraphic communication with Stockholm.

But one fairly serious difficulty threatened to delay her departure. So splendidly had they equipped the vessel that the funds essential to the expedition were threatening to run rather short. They had in fact to consider large purchases of fuel and a number of other charges and a new appeal for funds was necessary. As soon as it had been launched, the Committee was greatly moved, on the 2nd February, by two registered letters which arrived together.

The first was from Herr Malarius, Public Instructor in Norway and Laureat of the Botanical Society. It contained a bank-note for 100 kroners and a request to be attached as Assistant Naturalist to the *Alaska* throughout the expedition.

The second contained a cheque for 25,000 kroners, with this laconic note:

‘For the voyage of the *Alaska*.’

‘From Mr. Tudor Brown, on condition that he is accepted as a passenger.’

CHAPTER XII

UNEXPECTED PASSENGERS

THE REQUEST made by Herr Malarius was so touching that it could not but be welcomed gratefully by the Organising Committee. It was agreed to with enthusiasm, and the worthy instructor, whose reputation as a botanist was greater than he suspected, was nominated Assistant Naturalist to the Expedition.

As to Tudor Brown’s condition for the payment of his 25,000 kroners, Doctor Schwaryencrona and Herr Bredejord were at first greatly tempted to oppose it. But when they were

called on to explain the motives for their objection they found this very difficult. What reason could they give for asking the Committee to refuse so important a subscription? They had none of any weight.

Tudor Brown had brought to the Doctor the death certificate of Patrick O'Donoghane, and now Patrick O'Donoghane seemed to be alive. But where in this was the proof of any bad faith? That was what the Committee asked, quite reasonably, before refusing a sum which would get them out of their difficulty. The man might well maintain that he had been sincere, and his present offer seemed to prove it. Perhaps his only aim was to go in person to find how Patrick O'Donoghane, whom he had believed to be drowned off Maderia, should now be on the Siberian coast.

Even supposing that Tudor Brown had other ideas in mind, it was as well to be able to keep an eye on him, and to have him close at hand. For indeed, there were two possibilities; either he had nothing to do with the enquiry in which Erik's friends had so long been engaged, and if so it would be useless to treat him as an enemy; but if, on the other hand, he had a personal interest in this dark business, then it would be much better to keep an eye on him so as to thwart him.

So the Doctor and Herr Bredejord decided not to oppose his embarkation. Then they gradually began to want to study this remarkable man themselves and to know why he had taken passage on the *Alaska*. Or what if, like him, they too were to embark? After all, that wouldn't be so absurd!

The route of the *Alaska* was very attractive, at least its first half was. In short, Doctor Schwaryencrona, a great lover of travel, asked to be allowed to come as a passenger, were it only as far as the China Seas, and to pay whatever price the Committee thought reasonable.

His example at once had an irresistible effect on Herr Bredejord, who had long dreamed of making an excursion to the lands of sunshine. He too requested a cabin under the same conditions.

All Stockholm then thought that Professor Hochstedt would do likewise, partly through scientific curiosity, partly through the fear of having to spend long months without his two friends. But their expectations were disappointed. Though

greatly tempted to go, the Professor weighed the pros and cons so meticulously that he found it impossible to arrive at any decision whatever. So he settled by tossing up and fate ordered him to stay.

The start was irrevocably fixed for the 10th February. On the 9th, when Erik had expected Herr Malarius, he was agreeably surprised by the arrival of Fru Katrina and Vanda, who had come by train to bid him farewell. They had modestly taken up their quarters in an inn, but the Doctor insisted that they should come to stay with him— to the great displeasure of Kajsa, who did not find these guests distinguished enough to suit her.

Vanda was now a tall young lady, whose beauty had fulfilled its every promise. She had just succeeded in passing some very difficult examinations at Bergen, and this would have enabled her to claim a professor's chair in one of the High Schools. But she had preferred to stay at Noroë with her mother and to replace Herr Malarius during his absence. Both serious and sweet, she had taken full advantage of that instruction, but it had in no way altered the simplicity of her ways, her unusual and highly individual charm.

Nothing could be more unexpected than to see this attractive young lady, in her picturesque Norwegian costume, quietly discussing the deepest scientific questions or sitting at the piano and playing with consummate talent a Beethoven sonata. But her most charming characteristic was her complete absence of pretension and the natural perfection of her manners. She did not seek to court admiration, and she no more thought of being proud of her talents than she would have been of her buckled shoes. She wore her natural grace like a wild flower, taken from the edge of the fiord and cultivated by her old master in his little garden behind the school.

During the evening Erik's whole adopted family were assembled in the parlour. Herr Bredejord and the Doctor were playing a last game of whist with Herr Hochstedt. They found, too, that Herr Malarius was an adept at this noble game— this should allow them to enjoy their leisure on the *Alaska*. Unfortunately the worthy instructor revealed also that, a victim to seasickness, he would spend almost all his time, from the moment he set foot on board, in his bunk. To decide him

to embark nothing less had been needed than his affection for Erik, added to an ambition which he had always cherished throughout his hardworking life, to add some new types to the botanical families already classified.

After the whist they had a little music. Kajsa, looking somewhat disdainful, played a fashionable waltz. Vanda, with a voice of surprising range and accuracy, sang an old Scandinavian melody. Then tea was served, and a great bowl of punch was drunk to the success of the expedition. Erik noticed that Kajsa was obviously refusing to touch her glass.

'Aren't you going to wish us a successful voyage?' he asked in an undertone.

'What's the good of wishing what one doesn't want?' she replied.

Next day, at dawn, everybody was on board. Except for Tudor Brown, that is: since sending off his registered letter he had given no sign of life.

Sailing had been announced for nine o'clock. At the first stroke of the hour, Captain Marsilas had the anchor weighed and the bell rung to warn visitors to go ashore.

'Good-bye, Erik,' cried Vanda, throwing her arms round his neck.

'Good-bye, my son!' said Katrina, pressing the young lieutenant to her heart.

'And you, Kajsa, aren't you going to say anything?' he asked moving towards her as though to kiss her.

'I hope you won't have your nose frozen, and that you'll find that you're a prince in disguise!' she replied with an impertinent laugh.

'If I did, would it get me a little of your friendship?' he was trying to smile to hide the bitterness which this sarcasm brought to his heart.

'Can you doubt it?' Kajsa turned towards her uncle to indicate that the farewells were finished.

That was all. The warning of the bell became more imperious. The crowd of visitors went to the gangway, around which the shore-boats were pressing. In the midst of this confusion, hardly anyone noticed the arrival of a late-comer, who hurried on to the deck with a valise in his hand.

It was Tudor Brown. He introduced himself to the captain and asked for his cabin, which was shown him at once.

A minute later, after two or three strident and prolonged blasts on the whistle, the screw began to turn, a tumult of foam whitened the waters at the stern, and the *Alaska*, gliding majestically over the green waters of the Baltic, sailed away from Stockholm in the midst of the cheers of the multitude, who were waving their caps and handkerchiefs.

Erik, standing on the bridge, controlled this operation. Herr Bredejord and the Doctor, leaning on the after-rail, waved a last farewell to Vanda and Kajsa on the jetty. Herr Malarius, already feeling very unwell, had retired to his bunk. Among all the grief of separation, none of them had noticed the arrival of Tudor Brown.

So the Doctor could not repress a moment of surprise when, on turning round, he saw the man rising from the depths of the ship and walking straight up to him, his hands in his pockets, dressed just as he had been at their only interview and his hat still clamped down on his head.

'Fine weather,' said Tudor Brown, by way of greeting and introduction.

This calmness stupefied the Doctor. He waited for a few moments so that this strange person could at least make some excuse, give some explanation of his conduct. Seeing that nothing came of this, he opened fire.

'Well, sir, it seems as though Patrick O'Donoghane isn't as dead as they made out?' he began with his usual vivacity.

'That's just what we've got to find out,' the stranger retorted imperturbably, 'and it's to get to the heart of it that I came on this voyage.'

Thereupon Tudor Brown turned on his heels, and, no doubt regarding the explanation as satisfactory, began to stride up and down deck whistling his favourite air.

Erik and Herr Bredejord had followed this rapid exchange with a very natural curiosity. The presence of Tudor Brown was new to them. So they studied him attentively—indeed more attentively than the doctor. They fancied that this stranger, while pretending complete indifference, threw a furtive glance towards them from time to time, as if to find out what sort of impression he was making on them. So they at

once feigned, without saying a word, not to take any notice of his presence. But later, after they had gone down to the saloon from which the cabins opened, they took counsel.

What could be Tudor Brown's purpose in trying to verify the death of Patrick O'Donoghane? And what track was he now following in sailing on the *Alaska*? It was impossible to say. But it was hard not to think that this double attempt had something to do with the story of the *Cynthia* and 'the kid on the buoy.' All the interest which Patrick O'Donoghane had in the eyes of Erik and his friends referred to his supposed knowledge of this business, and it was solely because of this knowledge that they wanted to find the Irishman.

Well, they were now accompanied by a man who, without being asked, had recently declared that Patrick O'Donoghane had perished. And no sooner had his assertion been given the lie in the most unforeseen manner, than this man had forced himself on the expedition of enquiry! It must be inferred that he had some personal interest in all this, and the very fact that he had come to find Dr. Schwaryenerona indicated the connection which that interest had with the enquiry the Doctor was carrying out.

Thus everything seemed to show that Tudor Brown was a factor in the problem at least as important as Patrick O'Donoghane himself. Who knows if he were not already in possession of the secret which they were trying to elucidate? If this were so, were they to congratulate themselves on having him on board or to feel uneasy about it? Herr Biedejord inclined towards the latter opinion, and found the appearance of this personage not at all reassuring. The Doctor, on the other hand, declared that Tudor Brown might well be acting in good faith, and conceal under his eccentric appearance a wealth of honesty.

'If he does know something,' he said, 'we can always hope that he'll say something in the familiarity which is bound to arise during a long voyage! If so, it will really be a stroke of good fortune to have him with us. At worst, we'll be able to find out what he's got to do with Patrick O'Donoghane, granting, that is, that we ever find the Irishman.'

As for Erik, he could not even explain the feelings which the appearance of this personage aroused in him. It was more

than repulsion—even than hatred—it was an instinctive urge to throw himself on the man and hurl him into the water. An irresistible conviction forced itself into his thoughts, that this individual had something to do with the unhappiness of his own life. But he would have blushed at giving way to such a premonition or even at putting it into words. So he contented himself with saying that, for his part, if he had had a voice in the decision he would never have let Tudor Brown come on board.

What attitude should they take towards him? On this point, too, opinions were divided. The doctor maintained that it would be politic to treat Tudor Brown with at least an apparent benevolence, so as to make him talk. Herr Bredejord, like Erik, felt an invincible repugnance against playing that game, and it was moreover not at all sure that Dr. Schwaryencrona himself would have the strength of mind to conform to this programme. They decided to leave Tudor Brown to himself and to circumstances the task of deciding the attitude they were to take.

They did not have long to wait. Exactly at twelve the bell rang for dinner. Herr Bredejord and the Doctor went to the captain's table. There they found Tudor Brown already installed, still with his hat on and showing not the slightest sign of entering into relations with his neighbours. This man was really of a coarseness which disarmed indignation. He seemed a complete stranger to the simplest elements of good manners, helping himself first, choosing the best morsels, eating and drinking like an ogre. More than once the Captain or Dr. Schwaryencrona addressed him, but he did not even deign to reply to them, or he replied only by gestures.

But this did not keep him, at the end of the meal, while liberally making use of an immense tooth-pick, from swinging round in his chair and addressing himself to the Captain Marsilas:

‘What day shall we reach Gibraltar?’

‘The nineteenth or twentieth, I think,’ replied the captain.

Tudor Brown took a note-book out of his pocket and consulted his calendar, ‘That will bring us to Malta on the twenty-second, Alexandria on the twentyfifth, and at Aden by the end

of the month,' he continued as though he were talking to himself.

Thereupon he rose, went up on deck and once more began to stride up and down the poop.

'A fine travelling-companion the committee has wished on us!' Captain Marsilas could not keep from exclaiming.

Herr Bredejord was about to reply when a frightful din, breaking out at the top of the companion-way, cut him short: cries, barking, and confused voices. Everybody got up and hurried on deck.

The hullabaloo was caused by Klaas, the big Greenland dog that belonged to Captain Hersehom. It seemed that he did not approve of Tudor Brown, for, after having shown his hostility by deep growls at seeing him going backward and forward so close to him, he had finished by snapping at the man's legs. Tudor Brown had at once drawn a revolver from his pocket and was going to use it when Otto had arrived just in time to stop him and to lead Klaas back to his kennel.

A fairly confused discussion had then broken out. Tudor Brown, white with rage or fright, wanted to smash the dog's head. Hersehom, hurriedly sent for, protested vehemently against such a proceeding. The captain had been appealed to, and put an end to the dispute by asking Tudor Brown to put away his revolver and deciding that in future Klaas was to be kept on a leash.

The absurd incident was the only one which occurred during the early part of the voyage. Everybody at last got accustomed to the silence and the weird manners of Tudor Brown. At the captain's table they took to behaving as though he were not there.

Everybody found his own way of passing the time. Herr Malarius, after spending two days in bed, began to eat, and took his place at interminable games of whist with the Doctor and Herr Bredejord. Erik, kept very busy by his duties, devoted all his spare time to reading.

The navigation of the *Alaska* followed its normal course.

During the night of the sixteenth, Erik was asleep in his cabin when he was aroused by a great silence and realised that he could no longer hear the vibration of the screw. He did not have to concern himself about it, for the Second Mate was

on watch, but through sheer curiosity he got up to find out what was happening.

He then learnt from the Chief Engineer that the circulation pump rod had broken, that the fires had had to be put out, and that they were now proceeding under sail before a rather feeble wind from the south-west. The inspection took a fairly long time and threw no light on the cause of the damage, and the Engineer insisted that they should put in at the nearest port for repair.

Captain Marsilas, after making a personal examination, shared that opinion. They were then about 30 miles from Brest and orders were given to head for that great French port.

CHAPTER XIII

BEAR TO THE SOUTH-WEST

NEXT DAY the *Alaska* entered Brest harbour. Fortunately the damage was not very serious: an engineer had at once been called and he promised that everything should be repaired within three days. This delay was not important and they could partly make up for it by taking on coal, so enabling them to avoid refuelling at Gibraltar as they had meant; the next stop thus being put off to Malta, they would gain twenty-four hours, reducing the actual delay to two days. As the itinerary of the *Alaska* allowed for the unforeseen a margin of at least thirty days, there was no need to be anxious, and everybody was in the mood to take this incident philosophically.

Soon it was clear that the episode was going to be converted into a holiday. In a few hours the *Alaska's* arrival was known throughout the town, and as the journals had announced the aim of her voyage the vessel was made the object of the most flattering demonstration. The Port Admiral and the Mayor of Brest, the Harbour Master and the captains of the vessels in the roadstead came to pay an official visit to Captain Marsilas and a dinner and a ball were offered to these daring explorers who were going to look for Nordenskiöld. Far from enthusias-

tic though the Doctor and Herr Malarius were at these functions, they had to take the places laid for them. As for Herr Bredejord, he was in his real element.

Among the guests invited to do honour to the *Alaska* was a tall old man with a refined melancholy face. Erik soon noticed him, and read in his sad glances a sympathy which he could not mistake. He was M. Durrieu, the Honorary Consul-General and an active member of the Geographical Society, well known for his voyages in Asia Minor and the Sudan. Erik had read about these with the keenest interest, and when he was introduced to the French savant as an exceedingly competent man, he got a legitimate satisfaction such as does not often fall to the lot of travellers. When their adventures are published these may receive the commonplace admiration of the crowd, but it happens less often that they see their work appreciated by well-informed judges. The respectful curiosity of the young Lieutenant went straight to the heart of the venerable geographer and brought a smile to his pale lips.

'I had little merit in making these discoveries,' he told Erik, as they discussed the very successful digs he had recently been carrying out near Assouan. 'I went straight before me like a man who wants to forget cruel sufferings, and who cares little what result he obtains so long as he can busy himself with work that he loves. Chance did the rest.'

Seeing that Erik and M. Durrieu were such good friends, the Admiral took care to seat them together, so that they could continue their discussion throughout the dinner.

When they were taking coffee the Lieutenant of the *Alaska* found himself addressed by a little bald man who had been introduced to him under the name of Doctor Kerdaridec and who asked him point-blank what country he belonged to. At first a little surprised at the question, Erik replied that he was Swedish or, to speak more correctly, Norwegian, and that his family lived near Bergen. Then he wanted to know the reason for this question.

'My reason is quite simple,' was the reply. 'For a whole hour I have allowed myself to look at you across the table, and nowhere have I ever seen the typical Celt so clearly displayed as in yourself! I must explain that I am much given to Celtic studies—well, this is the first time that I have ever met the

Celtic type in a Scandinavian. This may well be a precious indication for science, and mean that we shall have to classify Norway among the regions visited by our Gaelic ancestors.'

Erik would no doubt have explained the reason which invalidated this hypothesis, but Doctor Kerdaridec turned away to present his compliments to a lady who had just entered, and the discussion ended there. The young Lieutenant would have thought no more about it if the next day when they were passing near the market Herr Schwaryencrona had not suddenly remarked, on seeing a cattle-drover from the Merbihan.

'My dear boy, if I had ever cherished a doubt regarding your Celtic origin I should lose it here. Just see how much all these Bretons resemble you. They have your complexion, your skull, your brown eyes, your black hair and in short your general appearance. Bredejord can say what he likes about it, but you are a pure-blooded Celt, you can be certain of that!'

Erik explained what Doctor Herr Kerdaridec had told him the previous evening, and this delighted the Swedish Doctor so much that he talked of nothing else for the whole day.

Like the other passengers on the *Alaska*, Tudor Brown had received and accepted the invitation. It even seemed likely that he was going to appear at the meal in his usual dress, for it was thus attired that he went on shore, but no doubt the necessity to take off his precious hat seemed too onerous, and just as he was going to cross the door he turned tail. He was not seen any more that evening.

On returning after the ball, where he had danced enthusiastically, Erik learned that Tudor Brown had returned on board about seven and had dined in solitary state. Then he had gone into the Captain's room to consult a marine chart. Finally, about eight, he had gone ashore in a boat and this was the last news they had of him.

Next evening at five he had not re-appeared, although he must have known that the repairs would be completed and the furnaces relighted, and that the *Alaska's* sailing could not be delayed. The Captain had taken care to warn everybody, and he now gave orders to weigh anchor.

The ship was about to cast off her moorings when a boat was seen approaching rapidly from the quay. Everybody thought that it was carrying Tudor Brown, but soon they saw

that it was only bringing a letter. To the general surprise this was addressed to Erik, and all it contained was M. Durrieu's card, upon which these words were pencilled '*Bon Voyage!* Speedy return!'

Let anybody who can explain what was happening in Erik's soul. This attention from an amiable and distinguished savant went straight to his heart, and brought a tear in his eye. Leaving this hospitable country, which he had scarcely known for three days, seemed to him like leaving a fatherland. He put the card into his pocket-book, telling himself that this farewell from an old man would bring him good luck.

Two minutes later, the *Alaska* began to move towards the harbour bar. By six she had crossed it and the pilot wished her *bon voyage*.

It was the 20th February. The weather was clear, and the sun had vanished beneath a horizon as clear as if it had been a summer day. But night was falling and soon the darkness would be complete, for the moon would not rise until ten.

Erik, who was on duty during the first watch, strode blithely up and down the bridge. He felt that Tudor Brown—the evil spirit of the expedition—had vanished.

'So long as he doesn't take it into his head to rejoin us at Malta or Suez!' he reflected.

And this was certainly possible—probable, even, if Tudor Brown wanted to spare himself the long *détour* which the *Alaska* had to make to reach Egypt. While he was coasting France and Spain, he could if he thought fit, stay for a week in Paris or elsewhere on the land-route and then rejoin the *Alaska* at any of her ports of call from Alexandria to Yokohama.

But this was only a possibility. The great thing was that he was not there now, and nothing more was needed to put everybody into a good humour.

So the dinner was the most cordial they had ever had. At dessert they drank to the success of the expedition, which in the depths of their heart they all associated more or less distinctly with the absence of Tudor Brown. Then they all went on deck to smoke their cigars.

The night was dark and a few lighthouses were in sight. A fresh north-easterly wind was increasing the vessel's speed by

pressing strongly against her larboard side. For this reason, although the sea was fairly rough, she rolled little.

As the diners came on deck the man on duty aft had just been heaving the log. 'Ten knots and a quarter,' he said in answer to the Captain's enquiry.

'That's a fine speed, which we should like to maintain for fifty or sixty days,' smiled the Doctor.

'Yes indeed,' the Captain replied, 'and then we shouldn't have to burn much coal to reach Behring Strait.'

Thereupon he left the Doctor and went down to his cabin, consulted a chart prepared by the British Admiralty. With such a chart and a compass, it seemed that a child would be able to steer the biggest ship even off this dangerous coast, where even an experienced seaman could come to grief. Chance however had it that Captain Marsilas had never before sailed in these waters, and indeed only the sheer necessity of putting in at Brest had brought him into them; but for this he would have kept much further out to sea. He had therefore to rely upon an attentive study of the chart to steer clear of all danger. But taking into account the various lighthouses and buoys, he need only make straight for the west and then veer to the south to find himself in the open sea.

One beacon was especially valuable on so dark a night, so the Captain, after making a further examination of the chart, decided to approach it nearer than he might have done in daylight. On going back on deck he glanced at the sea and told Erik to bear twenty-five degrees to the south-west.

This order seemed to surprise the young Lieutenant. 'You mean to the south-west?' he asked respectfully, thinking that he had misunderstood the order.

'I said to the south-west,' the Captain repeated somewhat drily, and he added, 'so this course isn't to your taste?'

'As you ask me, Captain, I must tell you that it isn't,' Erik replied frankly. 'I should have preferred to go further west.'

'Whatever for? To lose another night?'

The Captain's tone not allowing of any further discussion, Erik gave the order just as he had received it. After all, his chief was an experienced mariner in whom he could have complete confidence.

Slight though it was, the change of course was enough to

modify the ship's behaviour perceptibly. The *Alaska* began to roll heavily and at every lurch she dug her bow into the foam. All around her was a confused flurry of small white-crested waves. The log indicated 14 knots, and as the wind was rising Erik thought it prudent to take in two reefs.

Taken unawares by sea-sickness, the Doctor and Herr Bredejord hurried below. The captain, after walking up and down on the deck for a few minutes, followed them.

Scarcely had he reached his cabin when Erik went down to him. 'Captain,' he said, 'I've just heard suspicious noises to port. Anyone would think it was waves breaking on the rocks. I thought it my duty to tell you that in my opinion we're following a dangerous course!'

'Really, Mister, you're keeping mighty uneasy!' the Captain exclaimed. 'What danger can you be afraid of when we've got that lighthouse three good miles away, if it isn't four?'

And with an impatient finger he pointed out on the map the Isle of Sein, where the lighthouse towered up like a sentry at the extreme tip of Breton pier-head.

Erik followed the direction of the finger. He saw quite clearly that no danger was indicated in the neighbourhood of that isle, tapering to a point and surrounded by deep water. To a seaman's eye, nothing could be more reassuring or more decisive.

Yet it was no illusion, this sound of breakers that he had noticed to his left, to leeward, and hence only a short distance away.

A strange thing, which Erik hardly dared mention to himself, but he did not seem to recognise, in the outlines of these coasts which he had beneath his eyes, the forbidding and treacherous picture which his memory held of these shores, as he had seen them described in the geographies. What! To oppose a fugitive impression, a vague memory, to a fact as brutal and precise as an Admiralty Chart! He dare not. The charts are expressly made to protect the navigators against the mistakes or the illusions of their memory. He saluted his chief and retired.

Hardly had he set foot on the bridge when shouts reached him:

'Breakers to starboard!' Almost at once came a second warning: 'Breakers to port!'

Then from the deck came the blast of a whistle, accompanied by a confused trampling of feet, a series of manoeuvres executed one after another. The *Alaska* slowed down, and her engines went astern.

The Captain rushed up the companion-way, and at that very moment he noticed a dull sound like the rustling of a sledge over the snow. Suddenly a terrible shock threw him headlong, while the vessel trembled from her keel to the tip of her masts. Then silence fell, and the *Alaska* stayed motionless. She had just wedged herself between two submerged rocks.

Captain Marsilas, his head bleeding from his fall, got up to go on deck. Everything was in an unheard-of confusion. The frantic sailors were rushing to the boats. The waves were breaking furiously over this new reef that opposed them, the wrecked ship. The two shining eyes of the lighthouse on Tevennec and the Isle of Sein opened upon the *Alaska* as though to reproach her with having cast herself into the dangers which it was their duty to announce. Erik, standing on the bridge and leaning to starboard, was trying to pierce the darkness with his eyes and to estimate the extent of the disaster.

'Here, Mister, what's happened?' shouted the Captain, still half-dazed by his fall.

'What's happened, Sir, is that in bearing to the south-west, as you ordered, we've thrown ourselves into the breakers!' replied Erik.

Captain Marsilas did not say a word. What could he have said? He turned on his heels and went back to the companion-way.

Strange as it might seem, the situation was tragic and yet did not seem to offer any immediate peril. The very fact that the vessel was motionless, the presence of those two lights, the neighbourhood of the land, revealed only too clearly by these rocks between which the *Alaska* was gripped as though in a vice—all concurred in making this disaster sad rather than terrifying.

For his part Erik could see only one fact: the expedition cut short, the chance of finding Patrick O'Donoghane completely lost!

He had no sooner given vent to that somewhat cutting retort, dictated by the bitterness of his heart, than he had regretted it. So he left the bridge to go down to the deck and find his chief, with the generous intention, if it were possible, of giving him some sympathy.

But the Captain had vanished, and three minutes had not elapsed before an explosion rang out in his cabin. Erik dashed down to it. The door was locked on the inside. He burst it open with a kick.

Captain Marsilas was lying on the floor, his forehead gaping and smashed, and a revolver in his right hand.

Seeing the vessel lost through his own fault, he had blown out his brains. Death had been instantaneous, as the Doctor and Herr Bredejord, hurrying after the young lieutenant, at once confirmed. But this was no time for vain regrets. Erik, leaving to his two friends the task of raising the body and laying it on the bunk, had the duty of going back on deck and seeing to the safety of the crew.

As he was passing Herr Malarius' cabin, that excellent man, aroused either by the absence of any motion or by the revolver-shot, opened his door and thrust out his white head, crowned by the inevitable black silk night-cap. He had not stopped sleeping since they left Brest, and he had heard nothing.

'Well, what's happened? What's up?' he asked mildly.

'What's happened?' replied Erik. 'What's happened is that the *Alaska* has run aground, and that her Captain's just shot himself.'

'Oh!' Herr Malarius was overwhelmed with surprise. 'Well then, my boy, good-bye to our expedition.'

'That, my dear master,' Erik assured him, 'is another matter. I'm not dead, anyhow, and so long as a breath of life remains within me, I shall say: "Forward!"'

CHAPTER XIV

THE BASSE-FROIDE

THE '*ALASKA*' had thrown herself between the rocks with such violence that she seemed to have become part of them,

and she remained absolutely motionless. Yet the position did not appear to involve immediate peril for the crew. The waves that met this unaccustomed obstacle were beating upon it, sweeping the deck and throwing their spray right up between the masts; but the sea was not heavy enough for this to constitute a pressing danger. So long as the weather did not alter, they could count upon reaching day without any fresh disaster.

Erik saw this at a glance. In his capacity as first-mate he had naturally taken command. After giving orders to close the hatches and the deadlights and to throw tarpaulins over all the openings in case the sea should get heavier, he went down into the hold with the Master Carpenter.

There he realised with deep satisfaction that no water was coming in. The outer shell of the *Alaska* had clearly protected her internal hull, and the precautions taken againsts the polar ice had proved quite effective against the Armorican reef. Admittedly the engines had stopped, thrown out of gear by the frightful shock. But no explosion had occurred and there was no vital damage to deplore. Erik decided to wait for daylight to land his crew and passengers should that be necessary.

So he contented himself with firing the gun as a signal for help from the Isle of Sein and with lowering the steam launch to send her to Lorient.

‘Nowhere,’ he told himself very reasonably, ‘is there any chance of finding methods of salvage more prompt and more powerful than in that great maritime arsenal of Western France!’

So, in that tragic hour, when everyone else was thinking that all was irreparably lost, he was already beginning to hope. Or rather his intrepid spirit was of the type which knows no discouragement and will never admit itself beaten.

‘Just let it be possible to free the *Alaska*,’ he thought, ‘and we’ll see who’ll have the last word!’

But he took care not to express this hope, which the others would think fantastic. All that he said, after visiting the hold, was that everything was going well for the present and that they would have plenty of time to get help. Then he ordered a ration of tea to be served out to the crew, with a tot of rum.

It needed no more than this to put those big children into a

good humour. So the lowering of the steam launch was carried out with alacrity.

As this task was completed rockets sent up from the Sein lighthouse announced that help was coming to the wrecked ship. Soon red flares appeared in the night and passed to windward of the *Alaska*. Voices hailed her, and made it clear that shipwreck had taken place on the Basse-Froide off the Sein. A full hour elapsed before a boat could come alongside, so heavy was the swell and so dangerous the operation, but at last the six men whom she carried succeeded in laying hold of a rope ladder and hoisting themselves on board.

They were six fishermen from Sein—big daring fellows—and this was not their first job of salvage. They fully agreed with the idea of asking help from Lorient, for this little harbour on the Isle lacked the necessary resources. It was agreed that two of them should go off in the steam launch with Captain Herseborn and Otto, as soon as the moon rose. Meanwhile, they would give further information regarding the scene of the wreck.

But this was not sufficient to explain how while coming from Brest the vessel had run into such a danger. Erik promised himself to look into that question as soon as the launch had gone.

This was soon effected, and the young Captain decided that only the men on watch need remain on deck while the others went as usual to rest. Then he went down to the Saloon.

Bredejord, Malarius and the Doctor were watching beside the corpse, but on seeing Erik they rose.

‘My poor boy, what’s this tragedy and how did it happen?’ the doctor asked.

‘It’s quite inexplicable,’ Erik replied, as he bent over the chart spread out on the table. ‘I felt instinctively, and I said, that we weren’t on the right course. Yet by my estimate and everybody else’s we were at least three miles to the west of that light—about here,’ he added, indicating a point on the map, ‘And as you see there’s no danger indicated there—neither sandbanks or reefs! This dark colour shows a great depth! It’s inconceivable! Yet we cannot possibly imagine an error in an Admiralty chart and in waters so well known and

so minutely mapped for centuries! What's happened is as absurd as a nightmare!'

'Mightn't there be some mistake regarding our position? Couldn't you mistake one lighthouse for another?' asked Bredejord.

'That's almost impossible in a journey as short as ours since we left Brest,' Erik told him. 'Remember that we haven't been one instant out of sight of land and that we've kept going from one land-mark to another. We should have to assume that one of the lights shown on the chart hasn't been lit, or that a supplementary light has been added--in fact to assume the impossible. Not to add that that would not have been enough, for our course has been so regular, our log so carefully read, that we might say no error was admissible. We could chart our route within five hundred yards, and its end would correspond exactly to the position that we can see we're in with reference to the Isle of Sein lighthouse. Yet the fact is that we are on a reef when according to the chart we should have three hundred yards of water.'

'But how is all this going to end? That's what we want to know,' cried the doctor.

'We'll know quite soon,' Erik replied, 'if the maritime authorities are good enough to make haste sending us help. For the moment all we've got to do is to wait, and the best thing would be for everybody to go to sleep in peace, as if we were safely anchored in the bay.'

The young Captain did not add that he personally would reserve the care of watching while his friends went to rest. And that was what he did all night, sometimes striding up and down the deck and making sure that the men on watch were keeping on the look-out, sometimes going down for a few minutes into the Saloon.

As day was about to break he had the satisfaction of realising that the swell was obviously falling with the wind. He saw, too, that the tide was at its lowest ebb and that soon it would leave the *Alaska* almost high and dry. That gave him the hope of at once verifying the extent of the disaster. Towards seven in the morning he found it possible to carry out this examination.

The vessel seemed to be perched on some rocky points

which projected from the sandbanks. Three of them had pierced her external covering when she was wrecked and were supporting her as though she were in dry dock. The direction in which they faced, towards the north and against the *Alaska's* movement, explained how it was she had at once been stopped on the sandbank and prevented from going further on to the reef.

The orders which Erik had given had also helped to make the shock less terrible. The vessel, her engines having been put astern a few seconds before she touched, had been carried on to the reef only by what remained of her momentum and by the current. But for this she would no doubt have been rent in pieces. What was more, the wind and the waves, having held all night, had helped to keep her in place instead of hurling her upon the rocks as they would have not failed to do had the wind changed. On the whole, it would not have been possible to have had greater luck in a disaster. The whole question now consisted in managing to get the vessel free before a change of the wind would modify conditions so favourable.

Erik decided not to lose a minute. As soon as the crew had had breakfast he set all hands to work enlarging with their axes the three largest wounds made in her outer covering by the points of rock. Let a tug from Lorient arrive in time and it would be possible to free the *Alaska* at high tide with hardly any effort. The impatience with which the young Captain watched for the appearance of the smallest plume of smoke on the horizon may well be imagined.

Everything happened exactly as he wished. First, the weather stayed fairly calm and as favourable as could be expected. Then, towards noon, a despatch-boat, closely followed by a tug, came into sight. The boat was commanded by an officer who courteously placed himself at Erik's disposal.

'But first tell me,' he said, 'how you could have managed to through yourself into the Sein channel when you came out of Brest?'

'This chart will explain it,' Erik told him, 'it doesn't indicate any danger.'

The French officer examined, first with curiosity and then with consternation, the sheet spread out on the Saloon table.

'Good heavens, the Basse-Froide isn't marked, nor the point de Sein,' he cried. 'That's an unheard of negligence. What! the blue colour that shows a great depth just off the island, and this outline of the Point! Even the position of the light-house is incorrect! You're taking me from surprise to surprise. And yet it is a chart of the British Admiralty. But if ever there were a wretched chart it's certainly this one. Anybody would say that they'd taken pleasure in making it erratic, misleading and perfidious! In the old days, seamen used to play such pleasant tricks upon their rivals! I should never have believed that England should have kept such a tradition!'

'Are you quite sure it is England?' asked Bredejord, in his gentle voice. 'To my mind something else is possible, that this chart might be the work of a forger and have been placed in our pigeon-holes by some criminal hand.'

'By Tudor Brown,' Erik cried impetuously, 'that evening when we had dinner in Brest when he came into the State Room under pretext of consulting a chart. Oh, the scoundrel! So that's why he never came back on board?'

'That seems only too clear,' agreed Doctor Schwaryencrona, 'and so black an action presupposes such depths of rascality! with what motive could he have committed it?'

'And with what motive did he come to Stockholm for the express purpose of telling you that Patrick O'Donoghue was dead?' replied Bredejord, 'With what motive did he subscribe to the voyage of the *Alaska*? With what motive did he embark with us only to leave us at Brest?'

'I really think we must have been blind not to have seen in such facts a determination as logical as it is appalling. But how does all this affect his own interest? I don't know. But that interest must be grave, indeed terrible, for him not to have recoiled before such a method of putting a stop to our enquiry. For I'm convinced that it was he who made us put in at Brest, that it was he who led us as though by the hand to this reef where we should have found our death.'

'Yet it seems difficult for him to have foreseen the route the Captain would choose,' Malarius objected.

'Why? Wasn't that route clearly indicated by the very alteration that he made in the chart? After three days delay, it was certain that Captain Marsilas would want to make up

for lost time by going by the shortest route! Thinking that the sea was clear off the Sein and making for the south, there were nine chances out of ten that he would throw himself into this reef.'

'That's true,' put in Erik, 'but the proof that this was uncertain is that I tried to insist that we should go further west.'

'But who can say whether some of the other charts aren't just as ready to mislead us, even if we had escaped from the Basse-Froide?' enquired Bredejord.

'That's easy to make certain of,' Erik replied, and he took out of the pigeon-holes all the charts they contained.

On the very first chart they opened, that of Corogne, the French officer pointed out serious errors. This was also true of the second, that of Cape St. Vincent. The third was that of Gibraltar, and here the false indications leaped to the eye! Further examination was needless, and doubt was no longer possible. If the *Alaska* had not been wrecked off the Sein, she would certainly have been before she reached Malta!

As for the method used to prepare these attempts, a careful examination of the maps revealed it at once. They certainly were Admiralty charts, but they had been partly effaced by a chemical wash and retouched so as to give false indications among the true. Skilful though the retouching was, it could be distinguished, now that they had been warned, by trifling differences of tint and tone. One further fact put deliberate premeditation beyond all doubt: the *Alaska's* charts bore the stamps of the Swedish Minister of Marine, but those which had been inserted were unstamped. The forger had thought that they would not be examined closely enough for this to be noticed.

These disclosures plunged them into consternation. Erik was the first to break the deep silence which followed.

'Poor Captain Marsilas!' he said, his voice showing his emotion. 'It's he who has paid for us all! But as we've escaped almost by a miracle, we must strive at any rate not to leave anything else to chance. The tide's rising, and soon it will be high enough for us to try to get the *Alaska* off. If you agree, gentlemen, we'll get on with it at once.'

He spoke with a simple authority, a modest dignity, imbued in him by a knowledge of his responsibility. To find

himself, at his age, invested with the command of a ship, in such circumstances and at the start of so hazardous an expedition, had certainly been unforeseen.

But since the previous evening he felt certain of rising to his duty; he knew that he could rely upon himself, and upon his crew, and that knowledge transfigured him. The boy of yesterday was now a man, and his character impressed itself on all his companions. Herr Bredejord and the Doctor yielded to him like the others.

The operation, prepared for all the morning, proved easier than they had hoped. Lifted by the rising tide, the vessel was, so to speak, only asking to be moved clear of the rock-points which held her. It was enough for a tug to be attached to the cables at her stern and to haul on her; then, with a creaking of bending wood and rent-away planking the vessel escaped from that terrible grip.

Suddenly she found herself free—weighed down, it is true, by the water which had flooded into her watertight compartments, robbed of the help of her screw, which had been stripped of its blades, and of her engine, which stood motionless and silent but navigated after all, obedient to her helm and ready to proceed, if need be, under sail.

All the crew, grouped together on the deck, had followed with understandable emotion the progress of this decisive effort, and they greeted the vessel's freedom with a cheer. The French despatch-boat and the tug responded appropriately.

It was then three in the afternoon, and low down on the horizon the bright February sun flooded with light the calm scintillating sea, which was now covering the sand-banks and rocks of the Basse-Froide as though to efface even from the memory the drama of the night.

That very evening the *Alaska* was safely in the Lorient roadstead, and next day the authorities, with the best grace in the world, authorised her to be put into dry dock.

The damage to the hull was not very serious. That done to the engine was more complicated, but not beyond remedy. It might, indeed, have involved a long delay. But, as Erik had foreseen, nowhere in the world would it have been possible to find the resources offered it by the naval workshops, the forges and foundries, of Lorient. One of the local firms under-

took to repair the vessel in three weeks. They were now at the 23rd February; by the 16th March they could again be on their way— and with reliable maps, this time.

This left them three months and a half to reach Behring Strait by the end of June. That would not be impossible, although it confined them within fairly narrow limits. But Erik would never agree that they should give it up. There was only one thing he feared, that he might have to. So far fear of being recalled to lodge a complaint against the presumed author of the attempted crime, for fear of being detained during the criminal proceedings, he refused to send a report of the shipwreck to Stockholm.

But who knew whether such impunity might not embolden Tudor Brown to put further obstacles in the *Alaska's* path? That was what Bredejord and the Doctor asked as they played whist with Malarius in the little hotel where they were lodging at Lorient.

For Herr Bredejord the question admitted of no doubt. A rascal like Tudor Brown, as soon as he knew the failure of his attempt—and who could doubt that he knew it?—would never recoil before another. To think that they would ever reach the Behring Strait was thus more than a delusion, it was sheer madness.

He did not know how Tudor Brown would try to stop them; but the man was sure to find some way. Dr. Schwaryencrona was inclined to think similarly, and Herr Malarius was hardly more re-assured. This discouragement hovered above their games of whist, and the walks the three friends took round the city were not very gay. Their principal occupation was to watch the construction of the mausoleum which they were raising to Captain Marsilas, whose funeral had been followed by all Lorient. And the sight of that monument was hardly calculated to imbue his survivors with rose-coloured thoughts.

But it was enough for them to see Erik to have their hopes restored. His resolution was so unshakeable, his activity so unflagging, he showed so firm a will to surmount every obstacle, it so filled them with the certainty of overcoming, that they found it impossible to show, or even to retain, less heroic feelings.

One further fact came to show that Tudor Brown was fol-

lowing a definite programme. By the evening of the 14th March, Erik realised that the work on the engine was almost complete. All that was needed was to adjust one of the pumps, and this would be done next day, then everything would be ready at the agreed time. But that night the pump vanished from the workshops and it was impossible to find it. How had it been stolen? Who could have done it? That was what the most detailed enquiry could not settle. It needed another ten days to replace it, and this postponed the *Alaska's* departure until 25th March.

Strange as it may seem, this incident had more effect on Erik's mind than the shipwreck itself. He saw in it proof positive that a persistent will was preventing the vessel from sailing. And that redoubled, were this possible, the keen desire that he had to carry it out.

The ten days' delay were devoted to an examination of the question in all its aspects. The more closely he studied it, the more he was convinced that to aim at reaching the Behring Strait in three months, by a route known to Tudor Brown, when the *Alaska* still found herself at Lorient forty days after leaving Stockholm, would be to court failure, if not irreparable disaster.

This conclusion did not stop him, but it led him to think that some modification of his original plans was indispensable. He did not care to mention this, rightly judging that secrecy was the first condition of success. He contented himself with supervising the repairs more closely than ever.

But his companions thought they noticed that henceforth he seemed less anxious to get away. They concluded that in his heart he realised that the enterprise was impossible, as they for their own part had done already.

But in this they were wrong.

On 25th March, at noon, the *Alaska* sailed out of harbour, down the roadstead, and out to the open sea.

CHAPTER XV

THE SHORTEST ROUTE

THE FRENCH coast had just vanished below the horizon when Erik invited his three friends into the saloon to make an important announcement.

'I've given much thought,' he told them, 'to the circumstances which have marred our voyage since we left Stockholm. One conclusion forces itself on us, that we ought to expect to meet other obstacles or disasters on our way. The man who dared to try to send us to our deaths off the Basse-Froide won't easily admit he's beaten! Maybe he's already on the watch for us at Gibraltar or Malta or somewhere. Even if he doesn't destroy us, at least he'll succeed in delaying us. We shan't get to the Behring Strait in time for the summer, the only season when the Arctic Ocean can be reached!'

'That's my own opinion,' Bredejord agreed. 'I kept it to myself, for I didn't want to rob you of all your hopes, my boy. But I'm convinced of one thing, that in future we've got to give up the idea of crossing that distance in three months.'

'That's my opinion too,' added the Doctor. And Malarius showed by a nod of his head that he shared it.

'Well then,' Erik continued, 'that being so, what line of action is left to us to follow?'

'There's only one reasonable course that we're in duty bound to follow,' Bredejord replied. 'That's to give up our enterprise now we have to admit it's hopeless and go back to Stockholm. You must realise that, my boy, and in the name of us all I congratulate you on looking that necessity in the face.'

'That's a compliment I'm not going to accept,' smiled Erik, 'for I don't deserve it. No, I've not the slightest idea of giving up our enterprise, and I'm far from regarding it as impossible. I simply believe that to carry it out we've got to frustrate the machinations of the scoundrel who's looking out for us, and for that the first thing to do is to change our route completely.'

'A change of route could complicate our difficulties,' the Doctor replied, 'as we've chosen the shortest. It's going to be hard to reach Behring Strait in three months by way of the

Mediterranean and the Suez Canal, it would be completely impossible by way of the Cape of Good Hope or Cape Horn, for either of these routes would take us five or six months.'

The objection left Erik unmoved. 'There's another that would shorten the voyage instead of lengthening it, and where we're sure not to meet Tudor Brown.'

'Another route?' exclaimed Dr. Schwaryencrona. 'Well, I for one don't know it, unless you mean to go by way of Panama! And it isn't yet practicable for vessels, that I know of, and it won't be for several years!'

'I'm not thinking of going either by way of Panama or Cape Horn, or by the Cape of Good Hope. The route I'm talking of, the only one by which we can reach the Behring Strait in three months, is through the Arctic Ocean, the North-west Passage!'

Then, seeing that his hearers were stupified by this unexpected conclusion, Erik developed it.

'The North-west Passage is no longer what it was, the dread and the torment of the navigators. It's an intermittent route—it's hardly open every year for more than eight to ten weeks—but it's completely known throughout its length, charted on excellent maps, and frequented by hundreds of whalers. It's still unusual for anyone to follow it from the Atlantic to the Pacific, I quite agree, and most of those who reach it from one side or the other traverse only part of its length.

'It could even happen, if circumstances don't favour us, that it will bar our path—or we might find it open just when we need it. It's a chance we have to take! But I say that there's plenty of hope for success that way, while there isn't any, so to speak, by any other. And that being so, our duty, the mandate we've received from our subscribers, the one we've imposed on ourselves, is to adopt the only method left to us of getting to the Behring Strait in time.

'An ordinary vessel, equipped merely for navigation in tropical seas, might well hesitate before such a necessity. A vessel like the *Alaska*, equipped especially with a view to circumpolar navigation, needn't hesitate at all. For myself, I can only say that I may get back to Stockholm without Nordenskiöld, but I shan't go back without having dared everything to find him!'

Erik's reasoning was so apt that nobody tried to refute him.

What objection could the others have? They fully realised the difficulties of the new plan. But at least these difficulties might not be insurmountable, while any other method would be almost hopeless. So they had no hesitation in agreeing that it would be better to make the attempt than to return to Stockholm with their tail between their legs.

‘For my part, I can only see one serious difficulty,’ said Dr. Schwaryencrona, after a few minutes thought. ‘It’s the difficulty of getting coal in the Arctic Regions. And without coal, farewell to the possibility of traversing the North-west Passage by taking advantage of the time, often very short, during which it’s practicable!’

‘I’ve foreseen that difficulty, the only one there is,’ replied Erik, ‘and I don’t think it’s insoluble. Instead of heading for Gibraltar or Malta, where we’d be exposed to new machinations from Tudor Brown, we’ll make for London. There I’ll tell our office at Montreal, by Transatlantic cable, to send a coaler to Baffin Bay, and I’ll tell our San Francisco office to send another to the Behring Strait. We’ve got the necessary funds and more too, as we shall need much less coal than if we’d gone by way of Asia, the distance being much shorter.

‘There’s no point in our reaching the Baffin Sea before the end of May, and we couldn’t hope whichever way we went to reach the Behring Strait before the end of June. Our correspondents at Montreal and San Francisco will have plenty of time to carry out our orders, covered as they are by funds in a London bank. So the question simply comes down to finding the North-west Passage practicable. That doesn’t depend on us. But if we do find it closed, at least we shall have the consolation of being able to tell ourselves that we haven’t neglected anything which could bring us success!’

‘That’s obvious!’ exclaimed Malarius. ‘My dear boy, there’s nothing to say to your arguments!’

‘Gently, gently,’ cut in Herr Bredejord. ‘Don’t let’s get carried away! I’ve got another objection. My dear Erik, do you really think the *Alaska* could pass unperceived in the Thames waterway? Now, isn’t it true that the papers will talk about her arrival and the telegraphic agency announce it, that Tudor Brown will get to know about it? He’ll conclude that we’ve modified our plans. What’s to prevent him from modifying

his? Do you really think he'd find it difficult to stop the arrival of the coalers, without which we couldn't do anything?'

'That's true,' agreed Erik, 'and that shows that we've got to think of everything! We shan't go to London. We'll put in at Lisbon, as though we were still making for Gibraltar and Suez. Then one of us will set off incognito for Madrid, and without explaining why or how, he'll get into telegraphic communication with Montreal and San Francisco, to order the coalers. Nobody will know whom these boats are for, and they'll stay at points designated by the Captain, who'll take them an agreed watchword.'

'Splendid! Then it will be almost impossible for Tudor Brown to get on our track!'

'You ought to say "my" track, for I hope you're not going to get involved with me in the Arctic Seas!' said Erik.

'Well, I'm going too!' the Doctor replied. 'It shall never be said that that rascal Tudor Brown made me turn back!'

'Nor me!' Bredejord and Malarius exclaimed at once.

The young Captain wanted to oppose that resolution, to explain to his friends the dangers and monotony of the voyage they wanted to take with him. But he could not prevail against their decision. The perils they had already run together, they said, made it a point of honour to go right on to the end. The only way of making the voyage acceptable was not to separate. Hadn't every precaution been taken on the *Alaska* not to suffer overmuch from the cold? It wasn't going to be Swedes and Norwegians who'd be afraid of a touch of frost!

Erik had to give in, and it was agreed that the change of route would make no alteration in the vessel's personnel.

They sped through the first part of the voyage. On 2nd April the *Alaska* was at Lisbon, and before the Portuguese papers could announce her presence, Herr Bredejord had gone to Madrid, and got in touch, by means of a bank and the French Transatlantic cable, with two important business houses at Montreal and San Francisco. He had arranged for the coalers to be sent to the designated points and agreed on the password by which Erik could make himself recognised. This was no other than the motto found upon him when he was floating on the Cynthia's buoy: *Semper idem*.

At last, on 9th April, all the transactions being duly con-

cluded, Herr Bredejord returned to Lisbon and the *Alaska* made for the open sea.

On 25th, after a peaceable crossing of the Atlantic, she reached Montreal, took on some coal, and made certain that her orders had been punctually executed. On 29th she left the St. Lawrence; next day she crossed the Belle Isle Strait, which separates Labrador from Newfoundland. On 10th May she found at Godhaven, on the Greenland coast, the coaler which had preceded her.

Erik quite realised that at this date he could not hope to cross the Arctic Circle, nor to get involved in the tortuous windings of the North-west Passage, still closed for most of its length by the ice. But he hoped, with some reason, to obtain in this region, so much frequented by the whalers, definite information as to the best charts. He could also buy, admittedly at a fairly high price, a dozen dogs who would if necessary form a sledge-team with Klaas.

Fifteen days elapsed, then the *Alaska* went up the Davis Strait and along the Greenland Coast and crossed the Arctic Circle.

On 28th May she encountered floating ice for the first time at 70° 15' north latitude with a temperature just below freezing-point. This ice was, admittedly, either crumbling away or drifting in narrow isolated strips. But soon it became thicker, and to make headway they had to cleave it by blows of their ram. Though navigation offered neither serious danger nor real difficulty, a thousand signs showed them that they were in a new world. Everything a short distance away seemed devoid of colour and, so to speak, without substance. The eye did not know where to find rest with the horizon forever in motion, its aspect changing at every minute as these floating masses were dissolved by the waves and sun. But it was especially during the night and under the beams from the *Alaska's* crow's nest that Baffin Bay, which they had just entered, took on its most fantastic appearance.

'Whoever,' asks an eye-witness, 'Could describe these sad images: the rustling of the waves under the wandering ice-floes, the strange sound of the flake of snow as they are suddenly engulfed and are quenched in the water like a crackling flame? Who could describe the splendid cascades which flow

from every side, the splashing of the foam produced by their fall, the comic effect of the sea-birds asleep on an ice raft when their support suddenly failing them they fly away circling round, soon to settle once more on some other?

‘And in the morning what a strange phantasmagoria, when the sun with its brilliant halo of cirrus pierces suddenly through the fog, bringing into sight first a tiny patch of blue sky which increases very gradually, and seems to be following, right up to the horizon, the vaporous clouds carried away in a mad flight?’

Erik and his friends could contemplate such sights of the frozen sea at their leisure as they left the Greenland coast. They had followed it as far as Upperawik, then they made towards the west to cross the whole breadth of the Baffin Sea. Here the difficulties became more serious, for this sea is the grand highway of the Polar ice, swept along by the innumerable currents which flow into it.

The *Alaska* had almost incessantly to cleave her way through the immense icefields. At times she was stopped before insurmountable barriers through which she could not break and which she had to circumvent. Or she was assailed by tempests of snow, which covered deck, masts, and rigging as with a thick cotton-wool. Beseiged by the piling-up of the ice-flows which the wind suddenly thrust against her, she was threatened with being swallowed up beneath their weight. Or again she was trapped in a *wacke*, a sort of lake surrounded by the ice-bank and closed like a dead end. When she came out of it, would she find the sea open?

It was then above all that a look-out had to be kept not to be taken from the flank by some monstrous iceberg, coming from the north with bewildering speed, and whose frightful mass could have crushed the *Alaska* like a nut.

But an even more serious danger was that of the submerged ice which the keel brushed against and set aswing—real hydrostatic balances which only needed a touch to make them turn over with a violence often terrible enough to break everything before it like a battering-ram. The *Alaska* lost in this way her two sloops, and often she had to hoist her screw on board to straighten its blades. To get even an approximate idea of the trials and dangers offered every instant by Arctic navigation,

they have to be faced. After a week or two of such experiences the most daring crew is utterly worn out. They must have rest.

But at least these trials and these dangers had one compensation, the speed with which the degrees of longitude could be logged up. There were days when they amounted to ten or even twelve. There were days when they counted only one or even less. But at last on 11th June, the *Alaska* regained the shore and dropped anchor at the entrance to Lancaster Strait.

Erik had expected that he would have to wait a few days before venturing into this long canal. To his delighted surprise he found it free—at least at its entrance. So he pressed resolutely into it. But only to see it on the morrow day blocked by the ice for three whole days. Then, thanks to the violent currents which sweep along the Arctic channel, he was not long in finding it unencumbered, as the whalers at Godhaven had told him, and he could push on.

On the 17th, he reached the Barrow Strait and tore along it at full steam. But on the 19th, just as he was emerging into Melville Sound at the latitude of Cape Wankarem, he found he was again barred by the ice.

At first he bore the delay with patience, waiting for the ice to break up. But day followed day and the break-up did not come.

Meantime, the travellers did not lack for occupation. Held up near the coast and equipped with everything which could render their position less precarious, they could undertake sledge rides, hunt the seal, see the whales at play on the distance.

The summer solstice was approaching, and from the 15th the *Alaska* had the astonishing spectacle, new even to the Norwegians and Swedes from the south, of the Midnight Sun, grazing the horizon without sinking below it, then rising into the sky. By climbing a hill, not as yet named, that rose on these desolate shores, they could see the star of day describing a complete circle every twenty-four hours. In the evening, when they were still bathed in its light, further away to the south everything was plunged into darkness. The light, it is true, was pale and languishing; objects lost their outline; shadows became softer and softer; all nature took on the appearance of a vision. Then they felt more acutely than ever what a far-off world they

were in, and how near to the Pole! And yet the cold was not intense, the temperature going down only a few degrees below zero. Sometimes the air was so mild they could hardly persuade themselves they were really in the heart of the Arctic Zone.

Yet these unfamiliar features were not enough to satisfy Erik's heart or to make him lose sight of his supreme aim. He had not come here to botanise, like Herr Malarius, who returned every evening delighted with his explorations on shore and with the unknown plants with which he had stuffed his vasculum; nor to enjoy with the Doctor and Herr Bredejord the novelty of the aspects offered by circumpolar nature. It was a matter of finding Nordenskiöld and Patrick O'Donoghue, of fulfilling a sacred duty by perhaps discovering the secret of his own birth. And that was why he unceasingly strove to break the circle of ice which hemmed him in. Expeditions by sledge, journeys on snow-shoes as far as the horizon, reconnaissances in the steam-launch—for ten days he tried them all without being able to find an exit. To the west, as to the north and east, the ice-bank was closed.

They were at the 26th June and still so far from the Siberian Sea. Would they have to admit defeat? Erik did not agree. Repeated sounding had revealed the existence beneath the ice of a current running towards the south, towards Franklin Strait. He told himself that one effort, disproportionate though it might be, might suffice to bring about the break-up, and he made up his mind to try it.

Over a distance of seven nautical miles, he had dug into the ice-bank a series of mines, two or three hundred yards apart, and each containing a couple of pounds of dynamite; they were connected by a copper wire insulated in gutta-percha.

And on 30th June, at eight in the morning, standing on the bridge of the *Alaska*, Erik touched off the explosive with an electric switch.

A terrific explosion at once rent the air. A hundred volcanoes of fragmented ice spurted towards the sky. The ice-bank trembled and was convulsed as though by a submarine earthquake. Clouds of terrified seabirds circled round uttering raucous cries. When silence was restored a long black streak, with many lateral cracks in every direction, zig-zagged as far

as eye could reach across the ice-field. Lifted by the explosion of the gas, rent asunder by that terrible disruptive force, the ice-bank was ripped apart.

There was a moment's pause and, so to speak, hesitation; then the ice opened as if it had only been waiting for the signal. Cracking everywhere, split, rent into fragments, the ice-bank collapsed and yielded to the action of the current which was gnawing at its face: soon it was drifting away. Here and there a continent or a peninsula of ice still held out, as though to protest against such violence. But next day the channel was free; the *Alaska* could light her fires. Erik and the dynamite had done what the pale Arctic sun might not have accomplished until a month later.

On 2nd July the expedition arrived at Banks Strait; On the 4th it emerged into the Arctic Ocean rightly so called. Thence forward, in spite of the iceberg, the fog and the snow, the way was open. On the 12th the *Alaska* doubled Icy Cape; on the 13th Cape Lisburne; on the 14th, at ten in the morning, she entered Kotzebue Gulf, to the North of Behring Strait. There was found, as had been arranged, the coaler from San Francisco. Thus was accomplished, in two months and sixteen days, the programme drawn up off the coast of France.

The *Alaska* had no sooner stopped than Erik jumped into the whale-boat and went off to the coaler.

'*Semper idem,*' he said, as soon as he met her Master.

'Lisburne,' replied the Yankee.

'You've been waiting here a long time?'

'Five weeks. We left San Francisco a month after we got your telegram.'

'Are they still without any news of Nordenskiöld?'

'At San Francisco they'd heard nothing certain, but since I got here I've hailed several whalers. They say they heard it reported by the natives of Serdze-Kamen that a European ship had been held up for nine or ten months in the ice to the west of this Cape. They think that she's the *Vega*.'

'At last,' exclaimed Erik, with a delight easy to understand.

'And do you think she's still there and that she hasn't crossed the Strait?'

'I am certain of it. Not a ship has passed here for the last five weeks without my having hailed her.'

'God be praised! So our trouble won't go unrewarded if we succeed in finding Nordenskiöld.'

'You won't be the first.' The Yankee gave an ironical smile. 'There's an American Yacht ahead of you. She passed here three days ago and like you she enquired after Nordenskiöld.'

'An American Yacht?' cried Erik in amazement.

'Yes, the *Albatross*, Captain Tudor Brown, coming from Vancouver. I told him what I know, and he at once headed for Serdze-Kamen.'

CHAPTER XVI

FROM SERDZE-KAMEN TO LJAKOW

So TUDOR BROWN had got wind of the *Alaska's* change of course! So he had been able to forestall her at the Behring Strait . . . How and by which route? This seemed almost supernatural, and yet it had happened.

Painfully impressed though Erik was by the news, he showed no signs of this to anybody. But he pressed on with all his might with the transporting of the coal: then, his bunkers full, he headed without losing a minute for the Siberian Sea.

Serdze-Kamen is a long Asiatic promontory situated nearly a hundred miles west of the Behring Strait; the whalers from the Pacific visit it every year. After twenty-four hours' sailing, the *Alaska* reached it, and soon in the depths of the Koljutschin Bay, Erik was able to recognise behind a mass of ice the slender masts of the *Vega*; she had been held up here for nine whole months.

The barrier which held Nordenskiöld captive was not eight miles wide. After having gone past it, the *Alaska* returned eastwards to moor in a little creek, still open because it was sheltered from the north winds. Then Erik landed and crossed the ground to the station which the *Vega* had set up on the Siberian coast to pass this long wintering, and whose presence was announced by a column of smoke.

The *Vega's* camp consisted principally of a large store of provisions, set up under Nordenskiöld's orders in case the pressure of the ice-floes should unexpectedly destroy his ship, as so often happens during the winter in these fearsome regions. A touching detail; the wretched people of this coast, the Tschoutskes whose skin-huts were grouped around the station, who are always famished, and for whom this food-store represented incalculable riches, had respected it, although it was scarcely guarded at all.

Its most imposing building was the *Tintinjaranja* or ice-house, specially constructed to serve as a magnetic observatory in which all the necessary equipment had been installed. It had been built with regular blocks of ice, delicately tinted blue and bound together by the snow as though by cement: its plank roof was covered by a sail.

The travellers on the *Alaska* received a cordial welcome from the young astronomer who happened to be on duty when they arrived, together with a man posted on guard. He offered with the best grace in the world to take them to the *Vega* along the footpath marked out on the ice; this put the vessel into communication with the land, and a rope fastened to a series of uprights served as a guide during the dark nights. As they went along he related the adventures the expedition had encountered since it lost touch with the outer world.

On leaving the mouth of the Lena, Nordenskiöld had made for the isles of New Siberia, which he wanted to explore. But finding it almost impossible to reach them because of the ice which surrounded them and of the shallowness of the water around them for a distance of several miles, he had soon resigned himself to continuing his course eastwards. The *Vega* had not encountered any great difficulties until the 10th September. But towards that date, continual fogs and nocturnal frosts had slowed her up; the complete darkness of the nights necessitated frequent halts. Only on the 27th September had she reached Cape Serdze-Kamen.

There she fixed her anchor in an ice-berg, hoping that next day she would be able to cross the few miles which still separated her from the Behring Strait and the open seas of the Pacific. But the north wind, rising during the night, had thrust around her great masses of ice, which during the following

days had done nothing but thicken. So the *Vega* had found herself hemmed in and condemned to winter at the very moment when she had been about to reach her goal.

'Our disappointment was very great, as you may well imagine,' said the young astronomer; 'But we made the best of it by organising ourselves so as to turn this delay to the profit of science. We got into touch with the Tschoutskes of the neighbourhood, whom no traveller had yet studied at such close quarters. We were able to form a vocabulary of their language, and to make a collection of their utensils, weapons and tools.

'Our magnetic observations have not been without their use. The naturalists of the *Vega* have added a large number of new species to the flora and fauna of the Arctic regions. Above all, the main object of our voyage has been attained, for we have doubled Cape Tchelynskin and been the first to cross the distance between the mouths of the Yenissei and those of the Lena.

'At any rate, the North-east passage had been found and identified. It would have been pleasanter for us to have done it in two months, as we so nearly did—within a few hours at least. But all things considered, so long as we soon get free—as a number of signs permit us to hope—we shall have nothing to complain of, and we can go home with the certainty of having done good work.'

While listening with deep interest to their guide the travellers walked on. Soon they were near enough to the *Vega* to be able to distinguish her bow covered with a large piece of sail-cloth stretched up to the bridge which hardly left the poop uncovered, her sides protected by great piles of snow, her rigging reduced to her shrouds and stays, her funnel carefully protected against the effects of the frost.

The immediate vicinity of the ship looked even stranger. Instead of being, as they might have expected, enclosed in a unified bed of ice, she was so to speak suspended in the midst of a maze of lakes, isles, and channels across which it had been found necessary to throw wooden foot-bridges.

'The explanation of the mystery is quite simple,' the young savant told Erik. 'Any vessel which spends months in the midst of a raft of ice accumulates around it a layer of débris,

of which the cinders from the coal form the largest portion. This material, being darker than the snow and absorbing more of the sunlight, accelerates the thaw or even prevents it by acting as an isolater, according to its thickness or bulk. So when the thaw comes, the area around the ship soon takes on the aspect you can see, and becomes a real chaos of depressions large and small, of funnel-shaped hollows and dissected plateaux.'

The crew of the *Vega*, clad for the Arctic, and two or three officers grouped on the poop, were already watching the arrival of the European visitors. Great was their joy to hear themselves greeted in Swedish and to recognise among the newcomers the well-known face of Doctor Schwaryencrona.

Neither Professor Nordenskiöld, nor the faithful companion of his Arctic travels, Captain Palander, were on board. They were making a geological excursion inland and would not return for five or six days.*

*They actually returned earlier, for on 18th July the break-up began, and the *Vega*, after 264 days of captivity in the ice, could continue her voyage. On the 20th July she emerged from the Behring Strait and headed for Yokohama.—J.V. (or A.L.)

This was a first disappointment for the travellers, who had naturally hoped, when they found the *Vega*, to offer their respects and their congratulations to the great explorer. This however was not their only disappointment.

Scarcely had they entered the officer's quarters when Erik and his friends learned that three days ago the *Vega* had been visited by an American yacht or at least by its owner, Mr. Tudor Brown. This gentleman had brought news of the outer world, and of this the internees in the bay were naturally very greedy. He had explained what had happened in Europe since they left, the anxiety which Sweden and every other civilised country felt regarding their fate, the dispatch of the *Alaska* in search of them. This Mr. Tudor Brown had come from Vancouver Island, where his yacht had been waiting for him for three months.

'But you must know the rest of it,' put in a young Doctor attached to the expedition, 'for he told us that he had embarked with you and that he'd left you at Brest only because

he doubted whether you would be able to carry your enterprise through successfully.'

'He certainly had splendid reasons for doubting it,' Erik replied coldly, and not without an internal shiver.

'His yacht then being at Valparaiso, he telegraphed her to go and wait for him at Victoria on the coast of Vancouver,' the young doctor continued, 'but he came here himself by way of Liverpool and New York and the Pacific Railway. That explains how he got here before you.'

'Did he tell you what he came for?' asked Herr Bredejord.

'He came to bring us help if we needed it, and also to get information about a queer sort of fellow whom I had incidentally mentioned in my correspondence, and in whom Mr. Tudor Brown seemed to bear a lively interest.'

The four visitors exchanged glances.

'Patrick O'Donaghan? Isn't that what the man was called?' asked Erik.

'Exactly. It was at least the name tattooed on his skin, although he made out that it wasn't his own, but a friend's. He said his own name was Johnny Bowles.'

'May I ask if he's still here?'

'He left us six months ago. We thought at first that he might be useful to us as an interpreter with the natives on the coast, because of his apparent knowledge of the Samoyede language; but we soon realised that that knowledge was quite superficial, reduced to hardly a few words. And then it happened that for some distance we had no contact at all with the inhabitants of the regions we were coasting, so an interpreter would have been useless. What was more, this Johnny Bowles or Patrick O'Donaghan was lazy, drunken, undisciplined. His presence on board was bound to be a nuisance. So we welcomed with real pleasure his request to be landed with a little food on the large island of Ljakow, just as we were following its southern coast.

'What, it's there that he landed,' exclaimed Erik, 'But that island is uninhabited?'

'Absolutely! What attracted our man, it seems, is that it was literally covered with the bones of mammoths and hence with fossil ivory. He had hit on the idea of settling down there and devoting months of the summer to collecting the largest

quantity of ivory he could find; then when the winter came to freeze the arm of the sea which separates the island from the continent he would transport his wealth to the Siberian coast by sledge, so as to sell it to the Russian merchants who come as far as here looking for the products of the country.'

'You gave these details to Mr. Tudor Brown?' asked Erik.

'Certainly. He had come far enough to get them,' replied the young doctor, who had no idea of the deep personal interest which the Captain of the *Alaska* attached to the questions he had been asking.

Then the conversation became more general. They spoke of the relative ease with which Nordenskiöld's programme had been carried out: hardly anywhere had he encountered serious difficulties. Thence they went on to the consequences which the discovery of the new route might have for the world's commerce. No, the *Vega's* officers agreed, that route was never destined to become greatly frequented throughout its length, but her voyage would necessarily accustom the maritime nations of the Atlantic and the Pacific to regard direct communication by sea with Siberia as possible. And contrary to the general opinion, nowhere could the nations find a field for their activity so wide and so rich.

'Isn't it strange,' Herr Bredejord commented, 'that for three centuries this attempt has completely failed and yet today you've been able to accomplish it almost without difficulty.'

'It's not so strange as it seems,' one of the officers replied. 'We've profited, to the north of Asia just as you did to the north of America, by the experience acquired often at the price of their lives, by our forerunners. And we've also profited by the deep personal experience of our leader.'

'Professor Nordenskiöld had prepared for this supreme effort over more than twenty years during the course of eight great expeditions into the Arctic. He had patiently assembled all the elements of the problem and marched, so to speak, straightforward to its solution. Then we had what our predecessors lacked, a steamship especially equipped for this voyage. That allowed us to cross in two months distances which in a sailing ship might well have taken us two years. We have constantly striven not merely to choose a route but to seek one out, to evade the floating ice or to increase our speed by using

the currents or the winds. And yet we haven't been able to avoid wintering! What must not have been the difficulties for the sailors of yore, always having to wait for a favourable wind and perhaps losing the finest months of the summer in wandering about at random?

'Haven't we ourselves found the sea open a score of times where the maps indicate not only perpetual ice but even continents or islands? So we can go and reconnoitre and if need be go into reverse and choose another route, when the navigators of olden times were most often reduced to guess-work.'

Thus chatting and discussing, they spent the afternoon. The visitors from the *Alaska*, after having accepted dinner on the *Vega*, invited those of her officers who were not on duty to have supper on their own vessel. They exchanged news and information and Erik took care to acquaint himself with the exact route followed by the *Vega* and with the precautions he would have to take to follow it. They drank to the final success of both expeditions and exchanged the sincerest wishes for a safe return home; then they parted.

Next day, at the crash of dawn, the *Alaska* set off for the Ljakow Island. As for the *Vega*, she had to wait until the break-up allowed her to gain the Pacific.

Erik had thus accomplished the first part of his task. He had discovered Nordenskiöld. It now remained to him to accomplish the second part, by rejoining Patrick O'Donoghon to see if he could possibly tear his secret out of him. This secret must be extremely important as everybody now agreed, for Tudor Brown to have taken so much trouble to find the only man who held it.

Would they reach Ljakow Island before him? That was hardly likely, for he had three days' start. No matter! They would try. The *Albatross* might go astray, might meet with unforeseen obstacles, might let herself be caught up or even outstripped. So long as there remained the slightest possibility of success, they would attempt it.

It must be added that the mildness of the temperature was very reassuring. The air kept warm and damp; light clouds on the horizon indicated the open sea on every side, beyond the strip of ice which still hemmed in the Siberian coast, and in which the *Vega* was trapped. The summer had only just

begun, and the *Alaska* could reasonably count upon ten weeks of favourable weather.

The experience gained in the midst of the American ice now showed its value, enabling the new enterprise to be regarded as relatively easy. Finally, the North-east passage was incontestably the most direct way to return to Sweden, and in addition to the personal interest which urged Erik on to follow it, there was a real scientific interest in going the opposite direction over the course which Nordenskiöld had covered. If they succeeded—and why shouldn't they succeed?—that would be the proof and the practical application of the principle laid down by the great explorer.

The breeze joined in and seemed to want to favour the *Alaska*. For ten days it blew almost constantly from the south-east, allowing them to cover an average of nine or ten knots without burning any coal. This was a great advantage; moreover, the direction of the wind was drawing the floating ice towards the north, and making navigation easier. In those ten days they encountered only a few blocks of drift ice, or rotten ice, as the Arctic sailors call the half-melted remains of the winter ice-bank.

On the eleventh day, it is true, there was a tempest of snow, followed by fairly thick fog which perceptibly delayed the *Alaska's* progress. But on 29th July the sun re-appeared in all its glory, and on the 2nd August, in the morning, the eastern point of Ljakow was sighted.

Erik at once gave the order to sail round it to ascertain whether the *Albatross* might not be hidden in one of its creeks as well as to shelter the *Alaska* to windward of the isle. Having made his reconnaissance, he dropped anchor on a sandy bottom, about three miles from the island's southern coast; then he embarked in the whale-boat with his three friends and six of the crew. Half an hour later they reached a fairly deep inlet.

It was not without reason that Erik had chosen the southern coast. He told himself that Patrick O'Donoghon, whether he really meant to trade in ivory with Siberia, or whether he was going to leave the island where he had hidden it, must have chosen as his centre a point from which he could watch the sea. They could even say, with some degree of certitude, that

this point would be situated upon a height and as near as possible to the Siberian coast. Then the need to find shelter against the winds from the Pole must have been a further motive for choosing a southern aspect. Erik did not claim that these suppositions were necessarily well-founded, but anyhow, he told himself, there would be nothing inconvenient in using them as the basis of a systematic exploration.

The event seemed plainly to justify his expedition. The travellers had not followed the shore for an hour when they saw on a mound sheltered by a line of hills and facing the south, what could only be a house. To their great surprise this building, admirably constructed in the form of a cube, was perfectly white and seemed to be covered with a plaster coat. It lacked only the green shutters to look like a Marseilles *bastide* or an American cottage.

As they approached it, after climbing the hill, they found the explanation. The building was not plaster-coated: it was simply formed of gigantic bones, superimposed and arranged with a certain art; this gave it its white colour. Strange as were these materials, it must be agreed that the idea of using them was quite natural. Apart from the fact that there was no other building-material on the island, where the vegetation seemed very sparse, the soil of the hill and of all the neighbouring heights was literally covered with bony fragments which Doctor Schwaryencrona recognised at first sight as the remains of mammoths, bisons, and aurochs.

CHAPTER XVII

AT LAST!

THE DOOR of the cabin was gaping open. The four visitors entered and saw at a glance that its only room had recently been occupied. In the hearth, formed by three great stones, the cold cinders carried an ask as light as cotton wool, which would have been blown away by the slightest draught. The

bed, formed of a wooden framework on which was stretched a sailor's hammock, still bore the imprint of a human body.

This hammock, which Erik examined at once, was marked with the *Vega's* name.

On a sort of table consisting of a fossil shoulder-blade supported by four thigh-bones could be seen some crumbs of ship's biscuit, a tin mug, and a wooden spoon of Swedish make.

Hence they could not doubt that they were in the home of Patrick O'Donaghan, and that he had apparently not long been out of it.

Had he left the island? Or, on the other hand was he still wandering about on it? This there was nothing to show, and only an investigation could give the answer.

Around the house trenches and piles of earth bore witness to fairly active work. On a sort of plateau which formed the summit of a hill the nature of this work was indicated by a score of fossil ivory tusks arranged in a row. It was obviously a diggings intended to exhume the remains of vanished ages.

The travellers realised how necessary this work had been when they saw that of the many elephant and mammoth skeletons, those lying at ground level had been stripped of their ivory. No doubt the natives of the Siberian coast had not waited for Patrick O'Donaghan to come to the island before they themselves visited it to exploit its wealth. This meant that the Irishman had found nothing valuable on the surface; so he had had to dig into it to unearth any ivory which might be buried in it and whose quality seemed quite inferior.

But the young doctor of the *Vega*, like the owner of the *Red Anchor Inn* in New York, had declared that idleness was one of the distinctive traits of Patrick O'Donaghan. There was little likelihood therefore, that he had resigned himself for long to laborious and unremunerative work, and it was quite possible that he had taken the first chance of leaving the island. The only hope they still had of finding him rested on the very recent traces disclosed in the cabin.

A footpath went down towards the coast by the slope opposite the one which the explorers had climbed. They followed it, and soon reached a hollow where the melting snow had formed a sort of little lake, separated from the sea by a rock-

wall. The footpath followed the edge of this fresh water; then, going round the cliff, it led to a natural harbour. A sledge lay abandoned on the shore, and here too were the traces of a recent fire. Erik inspected the coast carefully, but without finding signs that a boat had landed. He was returning towards his companions when he saw, at the foot of a shrub and quite close to the fireplace, some red object. He at once picked it up.

This object was one of those white metal boxes, painted carmine on the outside, which contain preserved beef, usually called 'Bully beef,' and which all the navies of the world now carry on their galleys. This did not seem surprising at first sight, for Patrick O'Donoghane had been provided with food by the *Vega*. But what Erik thought significant was that the empty box bore a label bearing the imprint of a Valparaíso firm.

'Tudor Brown has passed this way!' he exclaimed at once. 'As they told us on the *Vega*, his ship was at Valparaíso when he cabled her to go and wait for him at Vancouver. Anyhow, it wouldn't be the *Vega* which left on this shore a box that came from Chili—and this box is quite fresh. It can't have been three days, perhaps not twenty-four hours, since it was emptied.

Doctor Schwaryencrona and Herr Bredejord shook their heads, as if reluctant to accept so definite a conclusion. But Erik, who was turning the box over and over, showed them something which removed all their doubts: the word *Albatross* written in pencil on the lid, doubtless by the purveyor who had supplied it.

'Tudor Brown had passed this way,' he repeated, 'and why should he have come, if it weren't to take off Patrick O'Donoghane? Look here, it's clear enough. He landed in this creek and his men had a meal round the fire while they were waiting for him. He went up to the Irishman, and either by persuasion or force he took him off. I am as certain of that as if I'd seen it.'

In spite of this, Erik wanted to explore the neighbourhood to make certain that Patrick O'Donoghane was not there still. But an hour's walk was enough to convince him that the rest of the island was completely uninhabited. No trace of a foot-

path, not the slightest vestige of a living creature. On all sides sand-dunes and valleys stretched away out of sight, without any vegetation, without a bird, without an insect to enliven the loneliness. And everywhere gigantic bones lying on the ground, as if an army of mammoths, of rhinoceroses and aurochs, had come here long ago to seek refuge from some frightful cataclysm, only to die on this lost island. In the distance behind the dunes and the valleys, a line of hills covered with glaciers and snow.

'Let's get way,' said Doctor Schwaryencrona, 'there's nothing to be gained by a more complete exploration, and what we have seen already is enough to assure us that they didn't have to go down on their knees to O'Donaghan to persuade him to leave.'

Before four o'clock, the whaler had regained the *Alaska*, which proceeded on her way.

Erik could not conceal that his hopes had received a decisive blow. Tudor Brown had succeeded in taking the lead, in being the first to visit Ljakow Island, and no doubt in taking Patrick O'Donaghan away, and it would henceforth be improbable that they would ever find him again! A man capable of doing all that he had dared to do against the *Alaska*, capable of so fierce an energy as to come and kidnap the Irishman in such surroundings, would assuredly not find it very difficult to keep anyone else from reaching him. The world is wide, and the whole expanse of the ocean was open to the *Albatross*! How could they guess to what point of the compass he would carry O'Donaghan and his secret?

That was what the Captain of the *Alaska* told himself as, after giving orders to steer westwards, he strode up and down on the poop. And to these distressing thoughts was added his remorse at having allowed his friends to share the perils and fatigues of this useless expedition!

Useless twice-over, because Tudor Brown had discovered Nordenskiöld before the *Alaska*, just as he had forestalled the Swedish expedition at Ljakow Island! So they could go back to Stockholm—if indeed they ever got there—without having attained either of the objects of the voyage. This was really too unlucky! But at least the return would be useful for something, and would check the voyage of the *Vega*. Let the North-east

Passage be consecrated by a second trial! At all costs they must reach Cape Tchelynskin and double it from east to west! At all costs they must return to Sweden by the Kara Sea!

It was then towards this much-dreaded Cape Tchelynskin, at one time regarded as impassable, that the *Alaska* was now cruising at full steam. The route it was following was not exactly that of the *Vega*, for Erik had no reason for returning down the Siberian coast.

Leaving to port Stolbovol and Semenoffski Islands, which were sighted on 4th August, she steered due westwards, almost following the 76th parallel, and she made such good progress that in eight days she had traversed thirty-five degrees of longitude, from the 140th to the 105th east of Greenwich. To tell the truth, this was not without burning a great deal of coal, for she had to face almost a constant head-wind. But Erik thought, with some reason, that he ought to subordinate everything to the need for getting as quickly as possible out of this dangerous neighbourhood. Once arrived at the mouth of the Yenisseï he could always arrange to refuel.

On 14th August, noon observation of the sun was not possible because of the dense fog which veiled the horizon and sky, but they estimated that they must be approaching the great Asiatic peninsula. So Erik ordered the most extreme vigilance, while at the same time he reduced speed. Towards evening he even gave orders to stop.

These precautions were not in vain. Next day, at daybreak on having the lead, they found only thirty fathoms, and an hour later land was sighted. The *Alaska* luffed until she came in sight of a bay, in which she dropped anchor.

They decided to wait before landing until the fogs cleared. But, the 15th and 16th having elapsed without this happening, Erik decided to go ashore, in company with Bredejord, Malarius and the Doctor.

A quick reconnaissance showed them that the bay where the *Alaska* was moored was situated at the extreme north of, and between, the two points of Cape Tchelynskin. On both shores the land was very low towards the sea, but it rose gradually in a gentle slope towards the south, as far as the mountains which the fog occasionally left uncovered and which seemed three or four hundred yards high. *

Nowhere was snow or ice to be seen, except on the edge of the sea, where, as everywhere in the Arctic regions, there was a coastal strip. The clayey soil was covered with an abundant vegetation of mosses, grass, and lichens, and the land was enlivened by the presence of a fairly large number of wild geese and ducks, and a dozen or so seals. On the whole, were it not for the fog which covered everything in its grey mantle, the general aspect of this famous Cape Tchelynskin or Severo offered nothing especially repulsive, above all nothing which justified the mournful fame it had kept for centuries.

As they made their way towards the furthest point west of the bay, the travellers caught sight of a sort of monument which crowned its highest point, and naturally they hurried up to it. As they approached they saw that it consisted of a cairn or pile of stones, supporting a wooden column formed by a beam.

THIS column bore two inscriptions. The first said:

“19th August 1878. The *Vega*, sailing from the Atlantic, has doubled Cape Tchelynskin, en route for the Behring Strait.”

The second ran:

“12th August, 1879. The *Albatross*, coming from the Behring Strait, has doubled Cape Tchelynskin, en route for the Atlantic.”

So, here again, Tudor Brown had forestalled the *Alaska*! It was 16th August! It was only four days since he had made that inscription!

In Erik's eyes this took cruel ironical meaning, as if to taunt him: ‘Right up to the end you'll be disappointed! Up to the end your efforts will be in vain! Nordenskiöld made the experiment and Tudor Brown checked it. As for yourself, you will return humiliated and confused, without having proved anything, found anything, learned anything!’

He was about to go away, without having added anything to the inscriptions on the column. But Dr. Schwaryencrona would not fear of this. Taking a knife from his pocket, he inscribed on the wooden shaft:

“16th August, 1879. The *Alaska*, sailing from Stockholm by way of the Atlantic, the Baffin Sea, the straits of Arctic America, the Siberian Sea, has doubled Cape Tchelynskin, en route for circumnavigating the Pole.”

Strange power of words! This simple phraseology, by reminding Erik what a geographical feat he was accomplishing almost without realising it, was enough to restore his good humour. It was certainly true, after all, that the *Alaska* was about to achieve the first circumnavigation of the North Pole!

Before him other travellers had traversed the Arctic Straits of North America and found the North-west passage. Before him, Nordenskiöld and Tudor Brown had doubled Cape Tchelynskin and traversed the North-east passage! But what nobody had yet done was to travel from one passage to the other, was to describe around the Pole, through the Arctic seas, the complete circle of 360 degrees. And only another 80 were required for the *Alaska* to achieve this! At most that might be only a matter of ten days sailing.

This new prospect so much inspired everyone that all they thought about was setting out, but Erik wanted to wait till next day to see if the fog cleared. But fog seemed to be the chronic malady of Cape Tchelynskin, so when a new day came without restoring the sunshine, orders were given to weigh anchor.

Leaving Taymis Gulf to the South, the *Alaska* steered west and sailed on throughout the day and the night of the 17th. In the morning of the 18th they at last emerged from the fog into a pure sunlit atmosphere. At noon they could take their bearings, and no sooner was this operation completed than the lookout announced a sail to the south-west.

A sail in these little-frequented seas is too extraordinary a sight not to demand special attention. Erik at once climbed into the crow's nest and scrutinised with his telescope the ship which had just been sighted. She seemed very low in the water and was rigged as a schooner and provided with a funnel, although at the moment she was not under steam. When he was back on the deck he was quite pale.

'That looks to me like the *Albatross*' he told the Doctor, and he gave orders for full steam.

In less than a quarter of an hour it was clear that they were gaining on the vessel, whose hull could soon be seen with the naked eye. Not only was she under sail with only a feeble wind, but her direction was forming a very acute angle with the *Alaska's*.

Then suddenly her pace changed. A thick smoke rose from

her funnel, forming a long black plume behind her. She was now under steam and was travelling in the same direction as the *Alaska*.

'No doubt about it, she's the *Albatross*!' muttered Erik, and he ordered the chief engineer to put on more steam. Already they were making fourteen knots, and a quarter of an hour later they were making sixteen.

The vessel they were chasing had not yet been able to reach such a speed, for the *Alaska* kept gaining upon her. In thirty minutes they were near enough to distinguish the details of her build, the men coming and going upon her deck. And at last the letters that spelled out her name: *Albatross*. Erik gave orders to hoist the Swedish flag, and at once the *Albatross* displayed the Star-Spangled Banner of the United States.

Another few minutes and the two vessels were only a few hundred yards apart. Then the captain of the *Alaska*, standing on the bridge and using a megaphone, hailed the *Albatross* in English.

'Ship Ahoy! I want a word with your captain.'

Someone appeared on the bridge of the *Albatross*. It was Tudor Brown. 'I'm the owner and Captain of this yacht,' he said. 'What do you want?'

'I want to know if you've got Patrick O'Donoghon on board?'

'Patrick O'Donoghon is on board and he'll talk to you himself,' replied Tudor Brown.

At his gesture a man joined him on the bridge. 'Here's Patrick O'Donoghon. What do you want with him?'

Erik had long desired this interview; he had come from far away to seek it, and yet, in finding himself unexpectedly in the presence of this man with red hair and a flattened nose who was looking at him rather suspiciously, he found himself momentarily at a loss and did not know what to say. But at last, collecting his ideas and making an effort:

'I want to have a long confidential talk with you,' he said. 'For several years I've been hunting for you and it was simply to find you that I came into these waters. Will you come aboard my ship?'

'I don't know who you are and I'm quite well off where I am!' the man replied. •

'But I know you! I learned from Mr. Bowles of New York that you were at the shipwreck of the *Cynthia* and that you've mentioned "the kid on the buoy!" I'm that kid and it's about this that I want to have any information you've got.'

'Then you'll have to ask someone else, for I am not in the mood to talk!'

'Do you want to make us think that it's something to your discredit!'

'You can think what you like, for it's all one to me!' the other replied.

Erik had made up his mind not to show any sign of annoyance. 'You'd do better to tell me of your own free will what I've got so much interest in knowing, than to find yourself having to give it to a law court,' he added coldly.

'A law court! You've got to get me there first!' the man retorted.

Here Tudor Brown put in a word, 'You can see that I'm not responsible if you can't get the explanation you want,' he told Erik. 'The best thing is to leave it at that and let each of us go our own way.'

'Why each our own way! Wouldn't the simplest thing be to sail on together until we arrive in some civilised country to settle the business we've got?' ask Erik.

'I don't know that I've got any business with you, and I don't need anybody's company!' replied Tudor Brown, who was evidently going to leave the bridge.

Erik stopped him with a gesture, 'Owner of the *Albatross*,' he exclaimed, 'I hold a regular commission from my Government and I'm an Officer of the Naval Police! I ask you to let me see your papers at once.'

Tudor Brown did not even reply; he went from the bridge with the man whom he had called.

Erik waited two minutes then he continued, 'Owner of the *Albatross* I accuse you of having tried to wreck my ship on the Basse-Froide and I summon you to reply to this accusation before a Naval Court! If you do not answer to this summons my duty will be to take you there by force.'

'You can do whatever you like!' cried Tudor Brown, giving orders to steam ahead.

During this discussion his vessel had imperceptibly swerved

and she was now at right-angles to the *Alaska's* prow. His screw suddenly began to turn and beat the waters into a boiling foam. A long blast from her whistle rent the air, and, plunging through the waves, the *Albatross* set out at full speed towards the North Pole.

Two minutes later the *Alaska* was hot in her pursuit.

CHAPTER XVIII

CANNON-SHOT

AT THE same time as he gave chase to the *Albatross*, Erik issued orders to clear for action the cannon which the *Alaska* carried in her bows. This operation took some time. When the cannon had been stripped of its tarred sheet, loaded, and made ready to fire, the enemy was found to be out of range. No doubt he had taken advantage of the brief stop to heap up his fires, and he was already three or four miles ahead. This was not, indeed, an unreasonable distance for a Gatling gun; but with the rolling, the speed of the two vessels, and the very small target offered by the American yacht, there was much more chance of throwing the shells into the sea than of making them hit their mark. Much better to wait. What was more, the distance of the *Albatross*, though it did not decrease, had stopped growing. Experiment had shown that the two vessels, driven at full speed, were almost a match for one another. The interval between them remained the same for several hours.

Nevertheless this was at the cost of an enormous consumption of coal—a commodity that was getting scarce upon the *Alaska*—and it was to be feared that this expenditure would be a dead loss, if night fell without their catching up the *Albatross*. Erik did not think it right to play this last card without consulting his crew. He had them assembled on deck and explained the position quite frankly.

‘My friends,’ he said, ‘You know what it’s all about. To see if we can take and hand over to Naval justice the rascal who tried to destroy us on the Basse-Froide—or whether we’ll let

him get away! We've scarcely got enough coal for six days. Any deviation from our route would make us liable to finish our voyage under sail, and that might jeopardise its success. What's more, the *Albatross* must be counting on night to give us the slip, and it will be essential to keep her in the beam of our searchlight and not to slow up for an instant. We're sure too that this course is bound to have an end, maybe tomorrow or the next day, at the barrier of eternal ice which defends the approaches to the Pole. But I don't want to continue this chase without asking you if you approve, and whether you'll accept in advance the complications it might throw us into.'

The men discussed this in low tones and asked Captain Herseboom to be their spokesman.

'We all feel that it's the *Alaska's* duty to sacrifice everything to capturing that wretch,' he said quite calmly.

'Splendid! We're going to do our very best,' Erik replied.

Sure now that the crew was with him, he did not spare his fuel, and in spite of the despairing efforts which Tudor-Brown made to outdistance him he managed to keep him in sight.

Scarcely had the sun set when the electric eye of the *Alaska* lit up at the head of her mainmast and fixed its gaze pitilessly upon the *Albatross*; nor did it leave her until day. All night the same interval continued between the two vessels, and the dawn found them still making for the Pole. At noon the position of the *Alaska* was $78^{\circ} 21' 14''$ north and 98° east.

The floating masses of ice, which had not been seen for about a fortnight, were beginning to get numerous, and every now and then, as formerly in the Baffin Sea, they had to be cleft with blows of the ram. Convinced that the ice-bank would not be long in appearing, Erik took care to swerve slightly to the right of the *Albatross* so as to bar her way to the east if she were tempted to change her course when she found herself unable to continue northwards.

This precaution was fully justified, for about two o'clock a long ice-barrier appeared on the horizon. The American yacht at once steered westwards, leaving the ice-bank four or five miles to starboard. The *Alaska* copied this manoeuvre, but this time she swerved to the left of the *Albatross*, so as to cut her off if she tried to return south.

The hunt became very exciting. Sure of the direction which

the *Albatross* would have to follow, the *Alaska* tried to take her from the side, so as to thrust her further and further towards the ice-bank. The yacht, more and more uncertain of her course and delayed by the floating ice, kept changing her speed, sometimes swerving towards the north, sometimes rushing frantically towards the west.

Erik, up in the crow's nest, watched her slightest tricks attentively so as to circumvent them by appropriate action. Then suddenly he saw the yacht stop short, swerve, and turn her bows towards him. A long white line stretching out to the west, showed clearly enough the cause of this manoeuvre; the *Albatross* had just thrown herself into the depths of a gulf formed by a southern promontory of the ice-bank, and like a wild beast in a trap she was showing fight.

The young Captain of the *Alaska* had not had time to go back down on deck when a shell passed whistling above his head.

So the *Albatross* was armed and meant to defend herself!

'I prefer this, for him to be the one first to open fire!' Erik reflected as he gave orders to reply.

His shell was no more fortunate than that of Tudor Brown and only got within two or three hundred yards of the target. But battle had now been opened and soon the fire became more accurate. An American projectile carried away the main-yard of the *Alaska* and fell upon the deck, where its explosion killed two men. A Swedish shell hit the poop of the *Albatross* and must have done much damage. Several other projectiles from both sides lodged in the rigging of the hull.

The two ships were getting nearer and nearer and making sudden swerves to exchange their shots when a distant rumbling began to mingle with the voice of the cannon. Looking round the crews saw that the eastern sky was now quite black.

But a storm, a curtain of fog or snow, if it came between the *Albatross* and the *Alaska*, would it allow Tudor Brown to escape? Erik would not have this at any price. He decided to board. Arming his crew with sabres, axes, cutlasses, he hurled his ship at full speed against the yacht.

Tudor Brown took care not to wait for him. He beat a retreat, cruising along the ice-bank and every few minutes firing his stern cannon. But his field of action was too restricted.

More and more narrowly pressed between the ice and the *Alaska*, he realised that no escape was possible except to try to do something very risky—to gain the open sea. After a few feints meant to deceive his adversary regarding his real intention, he attempted this.

Erik let him proceed. Then just at the very moment when the *Albatross*, rushing forward under full steam, came within his reach, he hurled himself upon her with his steel ram.

The effect of the blow was terrible. A gaping wound opened in the side of the yacht, which at once started taking in water, shuddered to a standstill, and became almost unnavigable. As for the *Alaska*, she had promptly gone astern and was preparing to renew her attack. The increasing menace of the sea left her no time.

The tempest came: a strong wind from the south-east, accompanied by whirlwinds of snow. Not only did it raise tremendous waves, it flowed into the gulf in which the two ships were trapped, as though in a funnel, by the enormous masses of floating ice. These seemed to be rushing together from every point of the horizon.

Erik realised that there was not a minute to lose, and that if he did not want to be helplessly hemmed in he must escape at once from this blind alley. Swerving eastwards, his only thought now was of fighting his way against the wind, against the snow, against the howling army of ice-floes.

But soon he had to admit that the attempt was hopeless. The tempest was raging so strongly that neither the *Alaska's* engine nor her steel ram could do anything. Not only did the ship fail to make headway, but at times she was driven back several yards, her masts groaning under the blast of the wind. A thick snow, hiding the sky and blinding the crew, had already covered the deck and the rigging with a layer a foot thick. The ice accumulated, piled up, raised its impenetrable mass still higher at every squall.

They would have to go back to the ice-bank, to look almost gropingly for the light to return. The American yacht had vanished in the tormented seas, and in the state into which the blow from the *Alaska's* ram had placed her it was more than doubtful whether she could survive. As to her getting out of the blind alley, Erik could not even imagine that this was to

be feared. The situation was indeed so serious that he had no room for personal worries, and every minute it was getting worse.

Nothing can depict the fearful horror of these Arctic tempests, in which the forces of primitive nature seem, so to speak, to awake to give the navigator an idea of what they might have been during the Glacial Age. Although there was scarcely five hours of twilight in this region where day and night mingle together, the darkness was complete. The engine had been brought to a standstill, so that they could not even turn on the electric searchlight.

To the shrieking of the storm, to the rolling of the thunder, to the din of the floating ice-bergs as they crashed together, were added in the darkness the noises of the ice-bank as it broke up everywhere. Each crevasse, as it formed, produced an explosion which rose above the roar of the tempest like the firing of a distress signal, and the frequency of these explosions indicated that the fissures could no longer be numbered.

Soon the *Alaska* was suffering their effects. The little haven in which she had taken refuge, like the other interstices in the gulf, was quickly invaded by the drifting ice. A mass of ice-bergs, cemented by the snow which was still falling, surrounded her hull, besieged her, pressed upon her like the jaws of a vice. Then she began to crack under the pressure of the ice-floes. Her beams groaned in harmony with the ice-bank with which she was now encrusted. At any moment it was to be feared that her hull would collapse; this would certainly have happened had she not been reinforced with a view to this terrible pressure.

Erik made up his mind not to give in without at least one struggle, and right from the outset he employed his crew in building around the vessel a vertical revetment of heavy beams. This was intended to reduce as far as possible the pressure and to spread it over a wider surface; but this reinforcement, although its immediate effect was to protect the hull, was not slow in bringing an unforeseen result which threatened to be fatal.

The vessel, instead of being crushed, found herself raised out of the water at every movement of the ice-bank, only to fall back upon the ice with the force of a pile-driver. At any

moment one of these frightful blows might have crushed her and dragged her below. To guard against this danger there was only one resource, to reinforce again, and to keep on reinforcing, the barrier of drifting ice and snow which gave some protection to the hull, to make this part of one solid mass able to survive all these movements.

Everybody on board worked furiously. It was an affecting spectacle to see this handful of men calling upon their feeble muscles to withstand the power of nature and trying with anchors, cables, beams, to heal the wounds made in the ice, to fill up these gaps with snow when one movement of the Arctic Ocean might rend all this work asunder. After four or five hours of superhuman toil they were at the end of their strength and yet the danger was still growing, for the tempest kept getting stronger.

Erik consulted his officers and decided to place in safety on the ice-bank a store of provisions and ammunition in case the *Alaska* could no longer resist these frightful shocks. Right from the outset, moreover, every man had been given his personal rations for a week and had been ordered, in case of disaster, to keep his rifle slung even while he was working. To land twenty tons of supplies could not be thought easy, but at last it was accomplished and a mound of provisions was built about two hundred yards from the vessel beneath a tarpaulin which the snow soon covered with a thick mantle of white.

This precaution taken, they felt more reassured as to the immediate results of a possible shipwreck, and the crew rallied their strength with an extra supper washed down with tea and rum.

Suddenly, in the very midst of this supper, a shock more violent than ever convulsed the ice-bank. A terrific pressure broke in the bed of ice and snow on which the *Alaska* was resting. She was gripped by her stern and raised with a terrible rending sound, plunging her bow into the gulf as if she were about to be swallowed up. There was a panic, and everybody dashed on deck. A few of the men thought that the moment had come to seek refuge on the ice-bank, and without waiting for orders they began to climb over the bulwarks.

Four or five of them succeeded in jumping on to the snow. Two others were trapped between the mass of ice which sur-

rounded the ship and her starboard side just as, in regaining her equilibrium, the groaning vessel came back on an even keel: their cries of pain and the noise of their broken bones were lost in the storm. Then once more the vessel stayed motionless.

It was a tragic lesson. Erik took advantage of it to advise his crew to keep cool, and always to wait for definite orders:

'You must understand,' he told them, 'that abandoning ship is a last resort, which we can use only in extremities. All our efforts must be devoted to saving the *Alaska*. Without her our situation on the ice-bank would be precarious indeed, and it is only if the ship becomes hopeless that we must evacuate her. It is above all essential that this should be done in good order if it is not to end in disaster. I rely on you all to get back quietly to your suppers, and to leave it to your officers to decide what is to be done.'

The firmness of this language had the immediate effect of reassuring even the most timid, and the men went below.

Erik then called Captain Hersebom and told him to fetch his dog Klaas and to follow him quietly. 'We're going to get on to the ice-field,' he continued in low tones, 'to round up the fugitives and to bring them back to their duty. This will be better than letting them wander about at random.'

The poor devils were still on the ice-bank and deeply ashamed of their escapade. At his first call they returned to the *Alaska*.

After seeing them return, Erik and Captain Hersebom went on to the store of food; there, they thought, some other seamen might have taken refuge. They went all round it without meeting anyone.

'I've been wondering,' said Erik, 'if it wouldn't be better to forestall another panic by landing some of the crew.'

'That might be better,' the fisherman replied, 'but it's to be feared that the others, the ones left on board, might be jealous and demoralised by so disquieting an action.'

'That's true,' Erik agreed. 'It would be wiser to busy ourselves until the last moment with struggling against the storm, and indeed that's the only chance we can have of saving the ship. But as we're here on the ice-bank, suppose we take advantage of this to see how it's behaving? I must say that all

these cracklings and roars have given me doubts about its solidity.'

Erik and his adoptive father had not gone three hundred paces north of the food-store when they were brought up short: a gigantic crevasse was opening up under their feet. To cross this, they would have needed the long jumping poles which they had omitted to bring. So they decided to follow its edge, turning towards the west, to see where it led to.

They found that this crevasse, or rather this fissure, continued for a long distance in that direction—so long that after having followed it for more than half an hour they could not see its end. Reassured by their exploration of the ice-field on which their store was placed, they turned back.

When they were half-way back towards the store, a new vibration of the ice bank was followed by roars and cracklings and a deafening clamour of smashing ice. Though not over-much dismayed, they hurried on more quickly, impatient to know whether this shock had had any serious consequences on the *Alaska*.

They first reached the store and then the little harbour which had sheltered their vessel. Then they rubbed their eyes and asked themselves whether they were dreaming: the *Alaska* was no longer there!

Their first thought was that she had been swallowed up by the sea. After a night like the one they had just passed this would have been only to nature.

But then they were struck by the fact that no debris was visible and by the novel appearance that the harbour had taken while they were away. They could no longer see that margin of drift-ice which the tempest had piled up in a few hours, and with which the *Alaska* had been encrusted. On the contrary, the ice-bank was as clearly marked as though it had ended by working itself loose from that adventitious margin and become independent.

Almost at the same moment Captain Hersebom realised something which had not struck him while they were traversing the ice, but which was quite obvious now that they were back to their starting point: the wind had changed and was blowing from the west.

'Mightn't it be possible that when the direction of the storm

changed, it drove the floating ice which held the *Alaska* out into the gulf? '

Yes, it was certainly possible. What remained to be seen was whether it was true.

Without further delay, Erik, followed by Captain Hersebom, made his way towards the end of the gulf.

They went on for a long time, covering three or four miles. Everywhere the edge of the ice-bank was clear of drift-ice; the raging waves were breaking upon it as though on a shore; but the gulf could no longer be seen and, what seemed even more strange, the promontory which had closed it towards the south had vanished.

At last Erik stopped. Now he had realised the truth he took Captain Hersebom's hand and pressed it.

'Father,' he said in serious tones. 'You are one of those to whom one can tell the truth. Well the truth is that the ice-bank has broken up and split off from the ice which holds the *Alaska*. The truth is that we're on an island of ice a couple of miles long and several hundred yards wide, and being carried over the water at the will of the tempest! '

CHAPTER XIX

RIFLE-SHOT

ABOUT TWO in the morning Erik and Captain Hersebom, completely worn out, had crawled under the tarpaulin which covered the food store and stretched themselves out side by side between two of the barrels against the warm fur of their dog. They had not been slow in falling asleep. When they awoke, the sun was already high above the horizon, the sky was again blue and the sea calm. The immense remnant of the ice-bank on which they were floating seemed to be motionless, so gentle and regular were its movements.

But all along its two sides gigantic ice-bergs were being carried along at frightful speed, chasing one another, colliding with one another, sometimes smashing one another. The land-

scape formed by these immense crystals, as they reflected or decomposed the sunlight like a prism, was one of the most marvellous that Erik had ever seen. Captain Hersebom himself, little inclined though he was in general—and especially in such conditions as these—to admire the splendours of Arctic nature, could not keep from being impressed at it.

‘How fine that would look from the deck of a good ship!’ he sighed.

‘Nonsense!’ Erik replied with his usual good humour, ‘on a ship all we could think about would be avoiding these icebergs and not being crushed to pieces, while on this island of ice we needn’t worry about them!’

This was clearly a very optimistic point of view. While Captain Hersebom contented himself by smiling sadly, Erik had decided to look on things by their bright side.

‘Isn’t it amazing good luck that we’ve got this store depot?’ he continued, ‘we should certainly give up hope if we found ourselves deprived of everything. But with twenty barrels of biscuits, and smoked meat and *branvin* and with our guns into the bargain and our cartridge belts, what have we got to be frightened of? At the very worst, of having to wait several weeks before we see a country where we can land! You’ll see, my dear father, that we’ll get out of this adventure like the survivors of the *Hansa*!’

‘The *Hansa*?’ queried Captain Hersebom.

‘Yes, a ship which set out in eighteen sixty-nine for the Arctic Sea. Part of her crew found themselves, like ourselves, cast away on an ice-raft, when they were taking on to it some food and coal. These gallant fellows were able to adapt themselves to this floating ice-bank. They lived upon it six and a half months, while it took them several thousand leagues, and they finished up by landing on the icy shores of North America.’

‘Let’s hope that we have the same luck!’ sighed Captain Hersebom. ‘But we’ll do better, I think, to eat something.’

‘That’s my opinion,’ Erik agreed. ‘A biscuit and a slice of smoked beef will be very welcome!’

Captain Hersebom broke open two barrels to get the materials for breakfast. With the point of his knife he dug a hole into a lump of frozen *branvin*, closing it at once with a piece

of wood which he had whittled into shape, so that he could 'bleed' it whenever he wished. Then they did honour to the food.

'Was the raft of the *Hansa* as big as ours?' the old fisherman asked, after ten minutes conscientiously spent in restoring his strength.

'I don't think so. Ours must be at least seven or eight miles long. The *Hansa's* was little more than a mile and a half, and it got much smaller after six months. Those wretched survivors had to abandon it because the waves were washing right over it, but fortunately they had a large boat so that they could leave the ice-bank and look for another. They went several times from berg to berg, like polar bears, up to the moment when they found *terra firma*.'

'Well, look at that!' exclaimed Captain Hersebom, 'they had a boat and we haven't got one. Unless we embark on an empty barrel I can't see how we're going to leave this raft!'

'We'll look into that when we have to,' Erik replied, 'For the time being what we had best do is to carry out a complete exploration of our domain!'

They rose and began climbing a sort of hillock of ice and snow—a hummock as it is technically called—to get a general idea of the ice-bank. This looked like a raft, or rather like an island ten or twelve miles long, and somewhat resembled a gigantic whale stretched out on the surface of the ocean, while the food store was almost on a line which would have marked off the whale's head. But it was difficult to judge its real size and shape, for a number of hummocks were distributed about its surface and blocked the view on all sides. The end which had formerly corresponded to the depth of the gulf was the most distant, and they decided to set out in that direction first.

The position of the sun showed that the end of the ice-bank which had pointed towards the west before it broke away from the main mass was now turned towards the north. So it might be supposed that they were travelling southwards, before the currents or the wind, and the fact that they could not see any trace of the long ice-barrier near the seventy-eighth parallel seemed to verify this.

The ice-bank was completely covered with snow, and on this there could be seen here and there black forms which

Captain Hersebom at once recognised as *Ougiouks*, large bearded walruses. These, no doubt, inhabited the crevasses or caves in the ice-bank and, thinking themselves safe from attack, they were taking advantage of the sun to get warm.

It took more than a hour's walk for Erik and Captain Hersebom to reach the far end of the raft, keeping along the edge because this enabled them to observe the sea and the ice-bank at the same time. Klaas, who was dashing on ahead, kept putting into flight some of the seals, which dragged themselves clumsily to the edge of the ice to throw themselves into the water. Nothing would have been easier than to kill them. But what would be the use of that, as they could not make a fire to roast or grill the flesh of these poor creatures?

Erik had other things to think about. A careful examination of the surface of the ice-bank showed him that it was far from being homogeneous. The many crevasses and fissures, some of which stretched right across the ice, made him fear that at the slightest shock it would split up into several pieces. These would still have been of a fair size, but the mere possibility of such an accident showed the need of keeping as much as he could within reach of the food store, so that they would not find it unexpectedly moving away. These fissures were mostly covered by the thick layer of snow which had fallen during the night and which, now that it was melting, was beginning to fill them up or at least to caulk them. Erik made up his mind to find out which of the many segments of the ice-bank was largest and most resistant, to make it his headquarters and to move the food depot on to it.

It was with this idea in mind that, after taking several minutes rest at the north point of the raft, he and Captain Hersebom continued their exploration of its west coast. They were now following the edge of the ice-bank which two hours before had marked the shore of the gulf in which the American yacht had taken refuge. Klaas ran on ahead, enlivened by the freshness of the air; he seemed to find himself in his own element on this snow carpet., which no doubt reminded him of the Greenland plains.

Suddenly Erik saw him sniff the air, set off like an arrow, and stop with a loud bark in front of some object half hidden by a mass of ice.

'Another *ougiouk* or a seal!' he decided without hurrying.

But it was neither an *ougiouk* or a seal which was lying on the edge of the ice-bank and accounting for the dog's excitement. It was a man, a man senseless and bleeding, whose fur garments were certainly not those of any of the *Alaska's* sailors. They reminded Erik of the *Vega*. He lifted the man's head, which was covered by a thick red coat of hair, and remarkable for a nose flattened like that of a negro.

Wondering whether he was the sport of an illusion, Erik opened the man's coat and bared his chest. This might have been to discover whether the heart was beating or to look for a name.

The name was there, tattooed in blue in a shield rather coarsely outlined; 'Patrick O'Donaghan, *Cynthia*.'

And his heart was beating! The man was not dead! All that ailed him was a great wound on the head, another on the shoulder, and a bruise on the chest which must have badly affected his breathing.

'We must take him to our shelter, tend him, bring him back to life!' he told Captain Hersebom. And he added in low tones as if he were afraid of being heard, 'It's him, Father, the very one that we've been looking for so long without finding him, Patrick O'Donaghan! here he is and almost lifeless!'

The thought that the secret of his life was there, beneath that thick bloodstained skull, on which death seemed already to have placed its mark, lit up Erik's eyes with a sombre flame. His adoptive father guessed what he was thinking of and could not keep from shrugging his shoulders as though saying to himself, 'A long way this takes us, when we might have known everything at last. And soon we shall know all the world's secrets.'

Nonetheless he grasped the body by the legs, while Erik took it under the arms.

At this the eyes of the wounded man opened. Soon the pain of his injuries became so great that he uttered some plaintive murmur, which the word 'drink' seemed to dominate. As they were still far from the food store, Erik decided to stop and support the wretched man against a hummock while he held a leather bottle to his lips.

It was almost empty, but a mouthful of brandy seemed to

restore O'Donoghon to life. He looked round, gave a deep sigh and said, 'Where's Jones?'

'We found you by yourself on the edge of the ice-bank.' Erik told him, 'Have you been here long?'

'I don't know,' the wounded man replied with an effort, 'Give me another drink!' he continued, fixing his eyes on Erik's.

He swallowed a second mouthful of brandy and found the strength to speak.

'When the tempest broke out,' he explained, 'the yacht was about to sink. Some of the men had time to throw themselves into the boats, the others have perished. Right at the outset Mr. Jones beckoned me to follow him into a little kayak at the stern, which the rest of the crew ignored because it was so small. It proved to be unsinkable. It's the only one which reached the ice-bank. All the boats capsized. We were terribly thrown about on to the drift-ice as the waves lifted us, but at last we could drag ourselves out of their reach and wait for daylight. This morning Mr. Jones left me to go to see if he could kill a seal or some sea-bird for our food. I haven't seen him since.'

'That Mr. Jones is an officer of the *Albatross*? 'asked Erik.

'He's her owner and captain too.' O'Donoghon's tone seemed to indicate surprise at the question.

'So the owner isn't Tudor Brown?'

'I . . . don't know,' the wounded man hesitated, apparently wondering if he had not gone too far in saying so much.

Erik did not insist on that point. He had plenty of other questions to ask!

'Look here,' he sat down on the snow beside the Irishman, 'the other day you refused to come on my ship for a talk and that refusal has caused plenty of trouble already! But now that we're together, let's take advantage of it to talk like reasonable people!'

'Here you are on a floating ice-bank, injured, without any food, unable to escape from the most cruel death without somebody's help! My adoptive father and I, we've got everything you need, food, weapons, *branvin*! All we ask is to look after you by sharing everything we've got with you and

putting you back on your feet! In return for our care, won't you show us a little confidence? '

The Irishman glanced indecisively at Erik as though in his mind gratitude was mingled with fear—a vague indeterminate fear.

'That depends on what sort of confidence you want!' he replied evasively.

'Oh, you know that well enough!' Erik replied, trying to smile and grasping the injured man's hand, 'I told you the other day; you know what I want to find out, what I've come to find out in these distant seas! Look here, Patrick O'Donoghhan, do make an effort; tell me this secret that's so important for me, tell me what you know about "the kid on the buoy!" Just give me some clue which will help me find my family! What are you afraid of? What harm can it do you to help me?'

O'Donoghhan did not reply; he seemed to be weighing these arguments in his confused mind.

'But,' he said at last with an effort, 'If we get out of this, if we get back to a country where there are judges, you'll be able to do me harm!'

'No, I swear! I swear by everything that's holy!' Erik replied fervently, 'Whatever harm you've done me or anybody else, I'll undertake that it won't recoil on you! Besides there's something that you don't seem to know, that these things are now statute-barred—I mean that whatever happened more than twenty years ago, human justice has no longer any right to bring you to account for it.'

'Is that true?' Patrick still seemed doubtful, 'but Mr. Jones told me that the *Alaska* had been sent by the police, and you mentioned the law courts yourself.'

'That was because of something more recent, an accident that happened to us when our voyage started! You can rest assured, Patrick, that Mr. Jones is making a fool of you. No doubt he's got some interest in your not speaking!'

'He certainly has got some interest!' the Irishman said in tones of conviction, 'Still, how did you find out that I know the secret??' he looked at Erik.

'Through Mr. and Mrs. Bowles, of the *Red Anchor* in Brooklyn, who often heard you talking about "the kid on the buoy".'

'That's true!' the Irishman agreed. Then he reflected again, 'so you haven't been sent by the police?' he insisted.

'No—what an absurd idea! I've been sent by myself, by the keen desire, by the thirst. I've got to find out what my country is, and whom my parents are, that's all.'

O'Donoghlan smiled with a touch of vanity, 'Oh, so that's all you want to know! he said. 'Well, true enough, I can tell you, I can! True enough I know all about you.'

'Tell me, O'Donoghlan, tell me!' Erike saw that the man was shaken. 'Tell me, and I promise to forgive all the wrong you've done, if you've done any, and to show you any gratitude I can!'

The Irishman glanced enviously at the leather bottle. 'It dries up the gullet to talk so much,' he said piteously, 'I could do with a little more brandy, if you like . . .'

'There isn't any more here, but we'll go and get some for you from the food-store. There we've got two big barrels,' Erik replied. He gave the bottle to Captain Herseboom, who went off at once, followed by Klaas.

'He won't be long getting back,' Erik continued, turning towards the injured man. 'Come on, my good fellow, and don't grudge me your confidence! Imagine yourself in my place! Suppose that all your life you hadn't known the name of your country, or that of your mother, that you'd come across a man who knows everything and that this man refuses to give you the information so precious to you, at the very moment when you've just saved him and are going to restore him to life! That would be cruel, wouldn't it? That would be intolerable! I'm not asking the impossible! I'm not asking you to accuse yourself, if you've got something to feel guilty about! Just give me some indication, however slight it may be; put me on the trail, that's everything I need!'

'Well, so long as it will please you,' Patrick was evidently moved. 'You know that when I was aboard the *Cynthia* . . .' He cut himself short.

Erik hung suspended on his lips. Had he at last got to his goal? Was he going to know the secret? Know the name of his family? That of his country? Indeed, this hope no longer seemed fantastic. All the time the injured man had been speaking, he had been staring at him, ready to drink in with avidity

what he was about to learn. For nothing in the world would he have disturbed him by any interruption or even by a gesture. He hadn't noticed that a shadow had just surged up behind him. But it was the sight of that shadow which had cut short Patrick's words.

'Mr. Jones!' he said, looking like a schoolboy surprised in telling tales.

Erik turned round and saw Tudor Brown, who was standing in front of an adjacent hummock, which up to now had hidden him from view. The Irishman's exclamation confirmed the suspicion which had suddenly leaped into his mind: Mr. Jones and Tudor Brown were one and the same!

He hardly had time to put that thought into words.

Two shots, following one another within a few seconds, had just made two corpses.

Tudor Brown had lifted his rifle and shot Patrick O'Donoghlan, who fell as though thunderstruck.

Before he had time even to lower his rifle, Tudor Brown received a bullet in his own forehead and fell face downwards on the snow.

'I did well to come back, when I saw suspicious-looking footprints in the snow!' Captain Herseborn declared. He had just reappeared, a smoking rifle in his hand.

CHAPTER XX

THE END OF THE JOURNEY

WITH A cry Erik had thrown himself on his knees beside Patrick O'Donoghlan, looking for the last sign of life, a last gleam of hope! But this time the Irishman was stone dead and he had taken his secret with him.

As for Tudor Brown, a last convulsion shook his body, his hands let drop the weapon he had been holding as he fell, and he died without a word.

'Father, what have you done?' Erik asked bitterly, 'Why suppress the last chance I had of learning the secret of my

life? Wouldn't it have been better to have hurled ourselves on that man and taken him prisoner? '

'And do you think he'd have left us time to do it? ' retorted Captain Hersebom. ' His second shot would have been for you, you may be sure of that! I've avenged the murder of that poor wretch, punished the crime of the Basse-Froide and perhaps plenty of other crimes too! Whatever may happen, I don't regret it! Anyhow, what does the secret of your life matter, my boy, in a situation like ours? The secret of your life, we'll no doubt be able before long to seek it from God! '

Scarcely had he uttered these words, when a cannon-shot rang out, reverberating among the ice-bergs and the ice-banks. Anybody would have thought that it was a reply to the old fisherman's discouraging words. But it was rather a reply to the two shots which had just been fired on the ice-raft.

'That's the *Alaska's* gun! We're saved! ' and Erik jumped on to a hummock to stare across the boundless sea.

At first he saw nothing but the ice-bergs borne along by the wind and swaying in the sunlight. But when Captain Hersebom, who had at once re-loaded his rifle, fired into the air, another cannon-shot was soon heard.

Then Erik clearly saw a wisp of black smoke rising towards the west against the blue of the sky. Rifle-shots and cannon-shots replied to one another at intervals of several minutes, and soon the *Alaska* appeared from behind an ice-berg, making at full steam towards the northern edge of the ice-bank.

Weeping with joy, Erik and Captain Hersebom threw themselves into one another's arms. They waved their handkerchiefs, hurled their caps into the air, tried by every means possible to signal to their friends.

At last the *Alaska* stopped, a whale-boat was lowered, and twenty minutes had not elapsed when it reached the ice-bank.

How can we express the joy of Doctor Schwaryencrona and the others at finding safe and sound those whom they thought were lost?

They described everything, the terror and despair of the night, the vain shouts, the impotent fits of temper. When the *Alaska* found herself at daybreak almost clear of the ice a mine was used to get her completely free. The first mate had taken command, and he at once set out in search of the floating

ice-bank, following the direction of the wind by which it had been driven off.

This voyage through the moving ice was the most dangerous that the *Alaska* had ever undertaken. But thanks to the skill which the young Captain had imparted to his crew, to the experience they had gained, to the precision of their manoeuvres, they had succeeded in making their way unharmed between these wandering masses of ice.

The *Alaska* had also the advantage that she was travelling in the same direction as the ice, though at a greater speed. Fortunately her chase had not been in vain. At nine in the morning the great ice-bank had been sighted to leeward, its shape had been recognised from the crow's nest, and soon those two shots had inspired the hope that the two castaways were still upon it.

The rest mattered little. They were going to make direct for the Atlantic, and it would be the devil if they didn't get there—under sail, because they had run out of coal.

'Not under sail!' Erik protested. 'I've two ideas. The first is to let ourselves be towed by the ice-bank, so long as it goes southwards or westwards. That will spare us these unceasing struggles with the ice-bergs—our raft will undertake to drive them away. The second is to collect the fuel we shall need to complete our voyage whenever it suits us to travel under our own steam.'

'What do you mean? That there's a coal-mine in the ice-berg?' laughed the Doctor.

'Not exactly a coal-mine,' Erik replied, 'but what comes almost to the same thing, a mine of animal fuel, in the form of fat. I can try the experiment, as we've got a furnace specially adapted for that kind of fuel.'

But first they had to pay their last respects to the two dead men, by throwing them into the water with a shot at their feet.

Then the *Alaska* cruised up to the side of the ice-bank so as to follow its movements while being protected by its bulk. That allowed them to reload quite easily the supplies which they had unloaded and which it was important not to lose. This done, the ship was moored to the northern end of the ice-raft, where she was well protected against the ice. Erik

soon ascertained that they were making an average speed of six knots, which would be quite enough, and he also made certain that there was no need to worry about the floating ice.

While the ice-bank went on majestically towards the south, like a drifting continent towing a satellite, a hunt of the *ougiouks* was organised.

Two or three times a day, parties armed with rifles and harpoons and accompanied by all the Greenland dogs landed on the ice-field and cornered the marine monsters asleep on the edge of their holes. These were killed with a bullet in the ear and skinned, and the fat was taken away and loaded on the sledges for the dogs to haul to the *Alaska*. This hunt was so easy and so rewarding that in eight days the bunkers were bulging with grease.

Still towed by the ice-bank, the *Alaska* was then at 40° east on the 74th parallel. She had passed Novia Zembla, skirting it to the north.

The ice-raft had now been reduced to half its original size and what was left of it, cracked by the sun, and traversed by fissures which kept getting deeper and deeper, would soon be breaking up. The moment was approaching when this great island would become nothing but drift-ice. But Erik did not want to wait for that. He cast loose the anchor and sailed westwards.

The walrus fat, burned in the *Alaska's* furnace with a little coal, made an excellent fuel, its only fault being that it sooted up the funnel so that this had to be cleaned every day. As for its odour, which would no doubt have affected passengers from the south very disagreeably, this was only a minor consideration for a Scandinavian crew.

Thanks to this fuel, the *Alaska* was able to stay under steam until the end of the voyage. In spite of adverse winds she soon crossed the distance which separated her from European waters, and on the 5th September she sighted the North Cape. Then she coasted the Scandinavian peninsula, traversed the Skager-rack and returned to her starting-point: On 14th September she lowered her anchor off Stockholm, in the very waters which she had left on the 10th February.

And it was thus that a seaman, only twenty-two years old,

completed, in seven months and four days, the first circumnavigation of the North Pole.

This geographical feat, which so quickly completed and checked Nordenskiöld's great expedition, attracted world-wide publicity. So far, however, the papers had not done justice to its value; only a handful of discerning people could appreciate this, and there was one person at least who never even suspected it—Kajsa.

The smile of superiority with which she welcomed the account of the voyage needed to be seen to be believed. 'As though anybody with any sense would face such dangers unless he had to!' was all she said except that at her first chance she did not fail to drop a word to Erik: 'Well, at least we shan't hear any more of this tiresome business now that famous Irishman is dead!'

What a difference between these cold words and the letter full of enthusiasm and kindness which soon reached Erik from Noroë! Vanda made him realise the distress in which she and her mother had spent those long months, when they had never ceased thinking of the travellers; she made him realise their delight at seeing them returning safely at last.

If the expedition had not had all the results that Erik had hoped for, she reminded him he must not let it distress him. He still knew that instead of his own family he had in that poor Norwegian village a family which loved him tenderly and which would always have him in their thoughts. Wouldn't he soon come to see them again, that family which still regarded him as one of themselves and which didn't want to give him up? If only he could find some way of spending just a short month with them! That was the dearest wish of his adoptive mother and of his little sister Vanda.

And with it were enclosed some flowers picked on the edge of the fiord; their perfume seemed to recall to Erik his cheerful carefree childhood. What happiness this brought to his disappointed heart, and how it helped him to bear the failure of his expedition!

All the same, he had to give in to the evidence. The voyage of the *Alaska* was an achievement as great as that of the *Vega*. Erik's name would everywhere be associated with the more glorious name of Nordenskiöld, and the papers spoke of

nothing but this circumnavigation. The ships of all the nations, moored off Stockholm, were dressed over all in honour of this naval victory. Erik, surprised and confused, found himself welcomed everywhere with the ovations normally accorded to conquerors. The Learned Societies sent their representatives to bid welcome to the Captain and crew of the *Alaska*, the Great Powers proposed a suitable reward.

This praise and fuss wearied Erik. He realised that his enterprise had been carried out chiefly for personal reasons, and he felt that he ought not reap a glory that he thought to say the least of it exaggerated. So he took the first opportunity of saying outright that he had gone into the Arctic seas simply to look for—without having found it—the secret of his birth, of his origin, of the shipwreck of the *Cynthia*.

He was able to explain this to a reporter from one of the chief Stockholm newspapers who went on board the *Alaska* to request the favour of a 'personal interview' with the young Captain, and whose aim was simply to extract from his victim the materials for a hundred-line biography.

He could not have found anyone more ready to be vivisected. Erik was only too anxious to tell the truth and to declare that he did not deserve to be taken for a second Columbus.

So he related the story of his life, from his having been picked up out of the sea by a poor Norwegian fisherman to his quest of Patrick O'Donoghon. He explained that he had no wish to be rewarded as a hero and that he felt ashamed at being overwhelmed with praise for doing what seemed only natural and quite simple.

Meantime, the reporter's pencil rushed over the paper with all the speed that shorthand could give. Dates, names, the slightest detail—all were jotted down. The reporter said, with his heart beating, that it was not a hundred lines that he was going to get out of this confession but five or six hundred. And what lines! A thrilling story taken from life as moving as a novelette!

Next day his account filled three columns in the most widely-read newspaper in Sweden. And, as so often happens, Erik's sincerity, far from diminishing his merits, enhanced them by the modesty which they showed and the romantic interest of

his story. Press and public devoured it avidly. These biographical details, soon translated into every language, were not slow in going around Europe.

It was thus that they reached Paris and made their way one evening, in a newspaper still hot from the press, into a modest drawing-room on the second floor of an ancient mansion.

There were two people in that room. One was a lady dressed in black and with white hair, although she still seemed young, and whose whole appearance bore the imprint of grief. Sitting beside a lamp, she was mechanically working at her embroidery, while in the gloom her eyes were fixed on some unforgettable and heartrending memory.

On the other side of the table an old man was glancing absently at the newspaper which his servant had just brought him.

It was M. Durrieu, honorary Consul-General and one of the Secretaries of the Geographical Society—the very one who had happened to be at Brest when the *Alaska* arrived.

No doubt it was because of this that Erik's name had struck his attention, for as he read the article giving the young seaman's life story, he trembled. Then he re-read that article more attentively. Little by little his face, already pale, was covered with a greater pallor. His hands twitched nervously. So obvious was his distress that his silent companion noticed it. 'Are you ill, father,' she asked anxiously.

'I think they've lighted the fire too soon! I'll go into my study where it's cooler! It's nothing! Only a passing weakness,' M. Durrieu replied as he rose to go into the next room.

As though absent-mindedly, he took away the paper he was holding. If his daughter had been able to read his thoughts she would have seen that they were dominated, in the midst of the tumultuous flow of hopes and fears which were jostling together within him, by his keen anxiety to take it out of her reach.

For a moment she thought of following him into his study. But she realised that he wanted to be alone and acceded to his wish. Soon, on hearing him coming and going, striding about the room, opening and shutting the window, she felt reassured.

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It was only after an hour that she decided to peep in through the door to see what he was doing. She realised that he was sitting at his desk and that he was writing a letter.

What she did not see was that as he was writing his eyes were full of tears.

CHAPTER XXI

A LETTER FROM PARIS

SINCE HIS return from Stockholm, Erik had received a voluminous correspondence from all over Europe. Learned Societies and private individuals sent their congratulations: foreign governments sought to shower honours and awards upon him; shipbuilders or merchants wanted information that favoured their own interests. So he was very little surprised when one morning he got two letters post-marked from Paris.

The first was an invitation from the Geographical Society of France for him and his comrades to come in person to receive a medal of honour awarded at a solemn convocation, 'To the man who first achieved the circumnavigation of the Pole through the Arctic Seas.'

The Second envelope made Erik tremble with emotion. Instead of a seal it bore a medallion engraved with the initials 'E.D.' surrounded by the motto *Semper Idem*.

These initials and this motto also appeared on the corner of the letter itself. It came from M. Durrieu and read:

'My Dear Boy---for that is what you must let me call you---I have just read in a French paper a biographical note which amazed me more than I can say. It referred to you. It said that you were picked up from the sea twenty-two years ago on a buoy bearing the name of *Cynthia*.

'If this is true (Oh, what I would not give for it to be true) I ask you most earnestly not to lose a minute, but to hasten to the telegraph-office and let me know.

For in that event, my child---imagine my impatience, my anxiety and my joy---in that event, you are my Grandson. He

whom I have lamented so many years, he whom I had thought lost for ever, he whom my daughter—alas, my poor broken-hearted daughter—still longs for and hopes for every day—her only child, the happiness, the consolation, and then the despair of her widowhood!

‘To find you, to find you not merely alive but glorious, that would be too wonderful and too great an honour! I dare not believe it without some indication from yourself! And yet it seems so probable! The details and the dates agree so exactly! Your appearance and your ways recall so clearly those of my poor son-in-law! On the only occasion when chance brought us together I felt myself drawn towards you by a deep sudden sympathy. It seemed impossible that there should not be some reason for this!

‘One word, one word at once by telegraph! I do not know how to live until it arrives. May it give me the reply that I am waiting for, that I long for so anxiously! May it bring to my poor daughter and myself a joy which will make up for a life of regrets and tears.

‘E. Durrieu.’

With this letter were some details which Erik devoured avidly. They too were from the hand of M^r Durrieu:

‘I was French Consul at New Orleans when my daughter Catherine married a young Frenchman, Georges Durrieu, our distant relative and like us of Breton origin. He was a mining engineer who had come to the United States to investigate an oil-field and who expected to stay several years. As welcome to my hearth as a man of his merit could be, bearing the same name as ourselves, and the son of a dear friend of my youth, he asked for my daughter’s hand. I gave it to him willingly. A little after their marriage I was unexpectedly given a Consular post in Riga, and as my son-in-law had to stay in the United States I had to leave my daughter with him. She became the mother of a child who was called Emile Henri Georges.

‘Six months later, my son-in-law was killed in a mining accident. After putting her affairs in order, my poor daughter, widowed at twenty, embarked at New York on the *Cynthia* to join me.

‘On 7th October, 1858 the *Cynthia* was wrecked to the east

of the Faroë Isles in circumstances which are still inexplicable and still seem suspicious. In the midst of the disaster, just as the passengers were getting into the boats, my seven-months old grandson, whom his mother had just fastened to a buoy, slid or was pushed into the sea, was carried off by the storm, and disappeared.

'My daughter, driven frantic by that frightful spectacle wanted to throw herself into the waves. She was saved by main force and thrust unconscious with three other people into a boat, the only one which escaped. It landed two days later on one of the Faroë Islands and it was thence that my daughter returned to me after a delay of seven weeks, thanks to the devoted care of a seaman who had saved her and brought her back to me.

'We had no real hope that the poor child could have survived, but I had enquiries made in the Faroë Islands, in the Shetland Islands, and on the Norwegian coast north of Bergen. The idea that the cradle could have gone further seemed impossible. I gave up my enquiries only after three years, and, as news of these had not reached Noroë it must be because this was an out-of-the-way place and had no direct contact with the coast.

'As all hopes seemed forever lost, I devoted myself exclusively to my daughter whose physical and moral health, demanded the greatest care. I tried to distract her mind by travel, and by interesting her in scientific research. She became the inseparable companion of all my work. But nothing I could do would cure her distress, so after two years I retired and we returned to Paris.

'Are we at last to see my grandson, for whom we have wept for so many years. This hope is too wonderful for me to dare mention it to my daughter, unless it is transformed into a certainty. That would be a real resurrection! And then if we had to give up the idea the disappointment would be cruel!

'It is now Monday. Next Saturday, the Post Office tell me, I ought to be able to have a reply.'

Erik could scarcely finish the letter; his sight was dimmed by tears. He also feared to give in too quickly to the hope which had so suddenly been bestowed upon him. He told

himself, however, that all the probability seemed to be here—the agreement of the dates and events, down to the slightest detail. But it was too good to be true! He dared not believe it! To find at once a family, a real mother, a country! And what a country! The very one he would have chosen from all others for it embodied, so to speak, the greatness, the grace, and the supreme gifts of humanity, because in it are reunited and merged the genius of the ancient civilisations, the flame and the spirit of modern times!

He feared that it was nothing but a dream. So often already his hopes had met with disappointment! Perhaps the Doctor would bring down the whole structure with a few words. It was he who must be taken as arbiter.

The Doctor carefully read the documents, not without interrupting himself several times, and letting slip an exclamation of surprise and delight.

‘There is not any shadow of doubt!’ he said at last, ‘all the details agree rigorously, even those which your correspondence has failed to mention—the initials on the clothing, the emblem engraven on the teething-ring and which is the same as that on his letter! My dear boy, this time you have found your family! You must telegraph your grandfather at once.’

‘But what shall I tell him?’ Erik was pale with joy.

‘Tell him that tomorrow you will hurry to him to throw yourself into your mother’s arms and into his!’

The young Captain took only the time to shake the worthy man’s hand, then he hastened to the telegraph-office.

That very day he left Stockholm, took the railway which conveyed him to the Swedish boat, crossed the strait, hurled himself at Copenhagen into the express for Belgium, and then at Brussels into the train for Paris.

Next day, at seven in the evening, exactly six days after he had posted his letter, M. Durrieu had the delight of waiting for his grandson at the Gare du Nord. A number of telegrams, sent off by Erik during the journey, had helped to preserve his patience.

At last the train came grinding in beneath the tall glass roof. M. Durrieu and his grandson fell into one another’s arms. In thought they lived so much together during these

last days of waiting that it seemed to them they had always known one another.

‘And mother?’ asked Erik.

‘I haven’t dared tell her everything!’ M. Durrieu replied.

‘So she doesn’t know anything yet!’

‘She suspects, she fears, she hopes! Since your telegram arrived I have done my best to prepare her for the unheard-of joys which await her! I mentioned a trail on which I had been put by a Swedish officer, by that young seaman whom I’d met at Brest and of whom I have often thought! She doesn’t know, she is still hesitating but I think she is beginning to realise that something is afoot!’

‘This morning, at breakfast, I found it very difficult to hide my impatience! I could see that she was looking at me anxiously and several times I thought that she was going to ask me to explain. I was afraid too, I admit. If some misunderstanding, some sudden incident, or what is worse, some misfortune, were to fall upon our heads! In such an event, as this you fear everything! So I did not dine with her this evening. I said I had some business to see to and thus I escaped from an intolerable situation!’

Without waiting for the luggage, they set off in the coach which had brought M. Durrieu to the station.

But Madame Durrieu, alone in her drawing room, was impatiently waiting for her father to return. He had rightly guessed, even while he feared it, that dinner would bring a demand for some explanation. For several days she had been disturbed by his expression, by the telegrams he had kept receiving, by the strange meaning which seemed to underline all his words. Accustomed to exchange with him the most trifling thoughts and the most trifling impressions, she could not understand that he could dream of hiding anything from her. Several times already she had been on the point of asking for an explanation, but she had kept silent because he had so evidently made up his mind.

‘He must be trying to prepare me for some surprise,’ she told herself, ‘I mustn’t spoil his pleasure!’

But, during the last two or three days, and especially that morning, she had been more impressed than ever by the impatience evident in all his movements, by the air of happiness

in his glance, by the way he kept making the references he had so long avoided to the wreck of the *Cynthia*. At last she got a dim glimpse of what was afoot. She had vaguely understood that there was something fresh, that her father believed himself rightly or wrongly, to be on the track of some favourable indication that perhaps he had regained the hope he had so long cherished of finding his child. Without supposing for the moment that things were far advanced, she had made up her mind to demand to know everything.

Never had Madame Durrieu given up completely the idea that her son might still be alive. So long as a mother has not seen with her own eyes the dead body of her child, she refuses, so to speak, to support by her belief the irreparable fact of his death. She tells herself that the witnesses may have been wrong, that appearances may have been misleading. She still believes in the possibility of his sudden return: one might almost say that she expects it. Thousands of mothers of soldiers and sailors have had this touching illusion.

Madame Durrieu had more than anybody else the right to believe this. That tragical scene was still before her eyes, after a lapse of twenty-two years, as on the first day. She could still see the *Cynthia* invaded by the waters and ready to be swamped by every wave that fell upon her. She could still see herself fastening her little child on to a large buoy with her own hands, while passengers and seamen were rushing to and fro and crowding into the boats. She could see herself left behind, imploring, beseeching, that at least they would save her child.

A man had taken that dear burden from her hands and threw her in a boat. And then at once a rush of the sea, a cataclysm of water--and the horror of seeing the buoy sweeping across the hull on the back of a wave, the tempest rushing into the cradle and carrying it off, like a feather into the midst of the foam!

Then a heartrending cry among so many other cries, a hand-to-hand struggle, a plunge into darkness--and unconsciousness! Then the awakening, the endless despair, the nights of fever and delirium! Then the endless grief, the long fruitless search and the conviction of her hopelessness ever growing and submerging everything.

Yes, she could remember all that, poor woman! Her whole

being had received so terrible a shock that it had stayed irreparably injured. It was almost a quarter of a century since this had happened, and Madame Durrieu was still lamenting her child as on the first day! Her mother's heart was bent over her grief and was slowly consuming her life in the sad contemplation of that one memory!

By a psychological mirage, she sometimes imagined her son passing through the successive phases of infancy, of adolescence, and of manhood. From year to year she had pictured him as he would have been, as indeed he might be—but she still cherished an obstinate belief in the possibility of his return! Against that dim hope nothing had prevailed, neither vain hopes, nor useless enquiries, nor the lapse of time!

And this was why, that evening, she was waiting for her father with a firm intention of having her suspicions cleared up.

M. Durrieu entered. He was followed by a young man whom he introduced in these words:

‘My child, here is M. Erik Hersehom, of whom I have often spoken and who has just arrived in Paris. The Geographical Society is awarding him its medal of honour, and he has done me the pleasure of accepting our hospitality.’

It had been agreed in the coach that this was what should be said, that Erik would speak later and rather casually of the child picked up at Noroë, and that thus they would try to arrive, without too sudden a shock, at the announcement of his identity. But when he found himself in his mother's presence he lacked the strength to act his part. He grew as white as death and bowed deeply without being able to say a word.

But she had risen from her arm-chair and was regarding him with kindness. Suddenly her eyes opened widely, her lips trembled, she held out her hand towards him.

‘My child! You are my child!’ she exclaimed.

Then taking a step towards him, ‘Yes! you are my child!’ she repeated, ‘Your father is alive in every one of your features!’

And while Erik, bursting into tears, fell on his knees before his mother, the poor woman, holding his head with both hands, fainted with joy and happiness even as she pressed a kiss upon his forehead.

CONCLUSION

A MONTH later the whole adoptive family of Erik were united with his mother and grandfather in their home near Brest. The delicacy of Madame Durrieu had wished to associate with her deep and inexplicable joy those kind and simple souls who had cared for her son. She had insisted that Fru Katrina and Vanda, that Captain Hersebom and Otto, should stay with her, along with Doctor Schwaryencrona and Kajsa, with Herr Bredejord and Malarius.

In the midst of the wild landscape of Brittany near the dark Armorican Sea, the Norwegian guests would feel themselves more at home than they would have in Paris. They went for long walks through the woods, they discussed everything, they shared what fragments of truth they possessed on this story, so much of which was still somewhat obscure.

Little by little the inexplicable points cleared themselves up. Light flashed from this comparison of the details during these long discussions.

- First of all, who was Tudor Brown? What was his interest in keeping Patrick O'Donoghon from putting them on the track of Erik's family? One word uttered by that unfortunate Irishman had been enough. Tudor Brown was really Jones, the only name under which Patrick O'Donoghon had known him.

Well, Noah Jones had been the partner of Erik's father in the exploitation of an oil-well which the young engineer had found in Pennsylvania. The bare mention of this fact threw a sinister light upon events which had so long remained mysterious. The wreck of the *Cynthia* in suspicious circumstances, the fall of the child into the sea, perhaps even the death of Erik's father—all that, alas, was due to the partnership agreement which M. Durrieu found among his papers.

'Several months before his marriage,' he explained, 'my son-in-law had found an oil-field near Harrisburg. He lacked the capital necessary to secure this property, and he seemed likely to lose all its advantages. Chance brought him into contact with this Noah Jones, who claimed to be a cattleman from

the far west, but who was really—as we learned later—a slave-trader from South Carolina.

‘This fellow undertook to find the money necessary to buy the Vandalia Oil Well and exploit it. But in return for his support he made George sign an agreement which was completely one-sided. I did not know that this existed when George married my daughter and he himself had apparently forgotten about it, for nobody could be less of an expert than himself in such matters. Gifted as a mathematician, a chemist, and an engineer, he knew absolutely nothing about business, and twice already his inexperience in such matters had cost him a veritable fortune. No doubt he had been as casual with Noah Jones as ever, and very probably he had signed the document with his eyes shut. Here’s one of its clauses:

“‘Clause 6. Only the children of either of the two partners can inherit his rights in the agreement. In the absence of a child of the deceased’s partner, or if the child or children of the deceased’s partner should die before reaching the age of twenty, the whole property would revert to the surviving partner, to the exclusion of all other heirs of the deceased.

“‘The reason for this stipulation is the different nationalities of the two partners and the complications which would ensue under any other arrangements.”’

‘This,’ M. Durrieu continued, ‘was the agreement which my future son-in-law had signed, at a time when he never even thought of getting married, and when nobody, except perhaps Mr. Noah Jones, realised the great value of the oil-well. They were still in the stage of making tests and trial borings. No doubt the Yankee’s intention was to disgust his partner by exaggerating the business difficulties, so that he could take over the whole property at a very small cost.

‘But when George married my daughter, the birth of our dear child, followed by the sudden realisation of the immense wealth of the oil-well, changed the whole situation completely. For it to revert to Noah Jones all that was needed was that first George and then his only heir should vanish from this world.

‘Then two years after his marriage, six months after the birth of my grandson, George was found lying dead beside one of the borings, asphyxiated, according to the doctors, by

some irrespirable gas. I was no longer in America, having been appointed Consul at Riga; so all the business affairs had to be settled by a lawyer.

'Noah Jones showed himself very sympathetic, and agreed to all the arrangements which my daughter made. It was agreed that he should continue to exploit the well and that he should pay periodically into the Central Bank of New York the part of the profits due to the child.

'Alas, he did not have to send even the first instalment! My daughter embarked on the *Cynthia* to join me. The vessel was completely lost in circumstances so suspicious that the Insurance Company was acquitted of all responsibility, and in the wreck George's only heir vanished. Thenceforth, Noah Jones was the only owner of the oil-well, which gave him an average income of a hundred and eighty thousand dollars!'

'Didn't you suspect his intervention in these dramatic events?' asked Herr Bredejord.

'I certainly suspected it, as was only natural, and such an accumulation of so-called accidents all tending in the same direction was unfortunately only too clear. But how could I justify my suspicions and bring the man to justice! I had only the vaguest indications, and I knew from bitter experience how little one can depend upon the Law Courts when international disputes are involved.

'And then I had to console, or at least to distract, my daughter, and a trial would only have revived her grief—not to mention that her motive would seem to be covetousness. In short, I kept silent. Did I do wrong? Ought I to regret it? I don't think so, and I still feel that I could have done no good. You can see how difficult it is, even today, and even when we combine all our impressions and all the known facts, to reach a definite conclusion!'

'But how do you trace the part that Patrick O'Donoghon played in this?' asked the Doctor.

'On this point, as on so many others, all we can do is to guess; but this at any rate seems plausible. This O'Donoghon, a seaman on board the *Cynthia* and attached to the Captain's personal service, was in contact with the first-class passengers, all of whom ate at the Captain's table. So he would know my

daughter's name, he knew her French nationality and he could easily identify her.

'Had he been entrusted by Noah Jones with some shady mission? Had he had a hand in that suspicious shipwreck, or merely into the child's fall into the sea? That is what we shall never know for certain, because he is dead.

'However this may be, he certainly knew the importance for her husband's ex-partner of "the kid on the buoy." From this for an individual such as he is made out to be, drunken and lazy, it was only a step to exploit that idea. Did O'Donoghane know that "the kid on the buoy" was still alive? Had he even helped to save him, possibly by fishing him out of the sea to drop him in again nearer the Norwegian coast, possibly in some other way? That of course is doubtful.

'But anyhow he must have assured Noah Jones that "the kid on the buoy" had survived the wreck and have boasted of knowing the country which had adopted him; and no doubt he had dropped a hint that he had taken precautions to let the child know everything if anything should happen. So Noah Jones had to buy his silence, and this must have been the source of the revenue the Irishman received every time he returned to New York.'

'That seems quite probable,' agreed Herr Bredejord. 'And I could add that the series of events confirms such a view. The first advertisements issued by Doctor Schwaryencrona had disquieted Noah Jones, and he had thought it essential to get rid of Patrick O'Donoghane, but he had to act prudently, because of the precautions the Irishman said he had taken. So he had contented himself with scaring him, probably by threatening him with criminal justice, and this accounts for the haste with which O'Donoghane had taken flight. It was clearly because he thought himself menaced by extradition that he had gone so far—as far as the Samoyedes—and under an assumed name. Noah Jones, who no doubt had given him this advice must have thought himself safe.

'But our advertisements must have alarmed him, for he travelled to Stockholm expressly to assure us that Patrick O'Donoghane was dead, and also, no doubt, to see with his own eyes how far our enquiries had gone. Then came the news from the *Vega* and the departure of the *Alaska* for the Arctic

Ocean. Noah Jones or Tudor Brown, seeing himself in imminent peril—for his confidence in Patrick O'Donoghhan must have been limited—would no longer recoil before any crime to make certain of his impunity. Fortunately, things have turned out well; but we may well say that we have had a very narrow escape!'

'Who knows? Perhaps those very dangers helped to bring us to our goal!' suggested the Doctor. 'But for that business at the Basse-Froide it's quite likely that we should have followed our original route through the Suez Canal and reached the Behring Strait too late to find the *Vega*. It is doubtful whether we should have been able to get anything out of O'Donoghhan, if we had met him in Tudor Brown's company! Indeed our whole voyage was determined by the tragic events of its beginning and it is solely due to the circumnavigation accomplished by the *Alaska*, to the celebrity which it brought upon Erik, that we have been able to find his family!'

'Yes,' Madame Durrieu agreed as she passed her hand over her son's hair, 'it's his own glory which has restored him to me!' And then she added, 'Just as it was that crime which took him from me—just as it was your goodness which preserved him for me, which has made so fine a man of him.'

'And just as it was the rascality of Noah Jones which made our Erik one of the richest men in America,' Herr Bredejord exclaimed.

The others stared at him in amazement.

'It is so,' the lawyer continued, 'isn't Erik his father's heir in the Vandalia Oil Well? Hasn't he been unlawfully deprived of his income for twenty-two years? And won't a simple proof of his identity be enough with so many witnesses, from Captain Hersebom who found him and Fru Katrina, down to Herr Malarius and ourselves? If Noah Jones has left any children, they'll be responsible for that enormous back-payment, which will probably absorb their share of the joint capital. If that rascal had no children, then, according to the agreement which M. Durrieu read to us, Erik is the sole heir to the whole property. Anyhow then, he ought to draw from Pennsylvania something like a hundred and fifty thousand or two hundred thousand dollars annual income!'

'Well, well,' laughed the Doctor, 'so the little fisherman

from Noroë has become a good match! Honoured by the Geographical Society, responsible for the first circumnavigation of the North Pole, afflicted with a modest revenue of two hundred thousand dollars, he's a husband whom one doesn't find very often at Stockholm! What do you say, Kajsa? '

The girl blushed at this question, whose cruelty her Uncle certainly did not realise. She was in the very act of telling herself that she had been a little clumsy in repulsing so distinguished a suitor, and that in future she must show him consideration.

But Erik, strange to say, had no longer glanced at her, for now he felt himself beyond her unworthy disdain. Whether his absence and his musings during his nights on watch had opened his eyes to the dryness of her heart, whether the satisfaction of no longer being in her eyes a miserable foundling was enough—henceforth, he showed her only the strict courtesy which she deserved both as a young lady and as Doctor Schwaryencrona's niece.

All his preference was now for Vanda, who indeed was becoming more and more charming as she shook off her simple village manners and became an amiable and distinguished woman. Her exquisite goodness, her native grace, her perfect simplicity, made everyone love her. She had hardly spent a week with them when Madame Durrieu declared openly that in future she could not bear to be parted from her.

Erik undertook to arrange everything by persuading Captain Hersebom and Dame Katrina to leave Vanda in France, on the understanding that every year she would go with him to visit them in Noroë. He had thought of keeping with him all his adoptive family and even of transporting to the Breton coast the wooden house in which he had passed his childhood. But this mass-emigration was thought impracticable. Captain Hersebom and Dame Katrina were too old for such a change in their habits, and could never be happy in a country of which they knew neither the language nor the ways. So they had to be allowed to return home, but not without assuring for their old age that ease which a life of honest labour had not yet brought them.

Erik would have liked at least to keep Otto. But he too preferred his fiord to all the earth's sea-coasts, nor could he

imagine any life preferable to that of a fisherman. If it must be admitted, the flaxen hair and the blue eyes of Regnild, the daughter of the manager of the cod-liver-oil factory, may have had something to do with the overwhelming attraction that Noroë held for him. This at least may be assumed, for it was learned that he was going to marry her at the next Yule-tide.

Herr Malarius undertook to carry out the education of their children as he had done that of Erik and Vanda. He had modestly gone back to his post at the village school, after finding himself associated with the honours bestowed by the Geographical Society of France on the Captain of the *Alaska*. He is at present correcting the proofs of his magnificent work of the flora of the Arctic Ocean, published at the expense of the Linnean Society. As for Doctor Schwaryencrona, he has not yet completed the great work on Iconography which ought to transmit his name to posterity.

The legal business undertaken by Herr Bredejord had been the lawsuit to establish Erik's rights in the whole property of the Vandalia Oil Well. He gained it both in the court of first instance and on appeal, which is no trifling success.

Erik took advantage of this success and of the great fortune which devolved upon him to buy the *Alaska*, which is now his pleasure-yacht. He uses it every year to go with Madame Durrieu and Vanda to see his adoptive family at Noroë. Although his civil status has been established and he now legally bears his name of Emile Durrieu he insists on adding that of Hersebom and everyone still continues to call him Erik.

The secret wish of his mother is to see him marrying Vanda, whom she loves like a daughter, and that wish confirms too much to his own inclination for it not to be fulfilled some day.

Meanwhile, Kajsa is still unmarried, with a vague feeling that she has, as they say, 'missed the coach.*' Dr. Schwaryencrona, Herr Bredejord and Professor Hochstedt are still playing whist.

One evening, when the Doctor was showing himself a worse player than usual, Herr Bredejord had given himself the pleasure of reminding him, as he tapped his snuff box, of something they had forgotten.

*Not the anachronism it seems: a literal translation from the French!—I.O.E.

‘When do you mean to send me your Aldine edition of Pliny?’ he said with a malicious gleam in his eyes, ‘you don’t think now that Erik is of Irish origin?’

For a moment the Doctor was stunned by the blow. But soon he recovered himself. ‘Bah! an ex-president of the French Republic is descended from the Kings of Ireland?’ he said in tones of conviction, ‘There would be nothing surprising if it were the same with the Durrieu family!’

‘Quite likely,’ Herr Bredejord replied. ‘It’s so probable, indeed, that for two pins I’d send you my Quintilian!’

EDITORIAL POSTSCRIPT

Consulted regarding Erik’s involuntary feat, the circumnavigation of the North Pole, the Royal Geographical Society inform me that, so far as is known, this has never been carried out. It would involve traversing both the North-west and the North-east Passages; and, the Society explain, “conditions have not been propitious for a combined voyage!”

Nordenskiöld traversed the North-east Passage more or less in the circumstances described. But though the North-west Passage had then been discovered, it was not actually traversed until 1906, by the Norwegian explorer, Roald Amundsen.

I.O.E.